

THE ANSWERING GLORY

By
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TO
MOTHER
AND
FATHER

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*. . . to feel, in the ink of the slough,
And the sink of the mire,
Veins of glory and fire
Run through and transpierce and transpire,
And a secret purpose of glory in every part,
And the an zering glory of battle fill my heart
R.L. S.*

THE ANSWERING GLORY

PRELUDE

SÃO MAHARO

THERE was very little difficulty with Captain Hobartson. He talked very rapidly at first, about losing his way in avoiding marshes, about his gun, about some books he had left somewhere—a jumble of nonsense. But very soon he fell into a sleep, restless but passive.

“How long has the Captain been here?” Gerrish asked the servant, the only person he could find who seemed to be attached in any way. “When did he arrive here?”

There was no answer. The boy seemed deaf alike to Portuguese and to all the dialect Gerrish knew. A short, squat youth, very big in the stomach, doglike in expression and with less than a dog’s intelligence.

“I should think about a week,” Gerrish said to himself. He was looking all round the room—the room Hobartson had made for himself by the simple process of fixing a partition across the long hut. Nearly everything was on the floor, there being only one rough table, two tobacco tins, both empty, the gun, some bandages, no cartridges anywhere. On the table itself there was some native food, rather evil-smelling; a copy of the *Cape Times*, four months old; a knife, with which Hobartson had

been weakly trying to carve something when they found him. Hobartson had obviously not shaved for a fortnight. Nothing in that, but he was also dirty, and that meant something; Hobartson was ultra-British in his habits, famed for it between the Azores and Madagascar.

Gerrish called to the sailor who had come ashore with him. "We shall have to take him off, Flock. We can manage him quite easily between us. It's not a hundred yards to the boat."

"Gen'lm'n been mauled, sir?"

"No, I don't think so. The blood's just from a cut on the thumb. He did it himself with that knife. He may've been poisoned, but I think it's just hossi. They all get it in time."

Gerrish knelt on one knee and lifted the sleeping man on to his shoulder.

"No," he said, "too heavy for me. The fever hasn't pulled his weight down. You get hold of his legs."

The awkward part was getting the huge load of bone and muscle through the doorway. The builder of the crazy hut had considered that fifteen inches was wide enough for the entrance. (He had had his reasons.)

"Rest here a moment," Gerrish grunted, and with great gentleness they lowered their burden on to the brown grass.

Flock asked: "What about the lady, sir?"

"Damn!" said Gerrish, "I'd forgotten about her."

He went back into the hut and found the girl in the room beyond the partition. She had taken off her boots and was lacing up a stronger pair.

"I thought I had better keep out of the way while you were talking," she said.

"Oh? We've finished talking. Captain Hobartson's asleep."

"Asleep?"

"Yes, didn't you hear us carrying him out? He's got fever. I shall have to take him off."

"You mean—take him on to the ship?" The girl's face had suddenly become pale.

"Yes. You'll have to come too. I'm sorry."

"But—I can't. I have to get to Homar Town."

Gerrish fixed her with his dark, heavily-protected eyes. They said at Plymouth, where he was known best, that he was the kindest skipper in the Merchant Service. Perhaps because he knew this he always scowled, was always abrupt in manner, swift in his actions. Even when he spoke his lower lip was raised so that it almost covered the upper. At this moment he had every wish to frighten the girl.

"Look here, Miss Thompson, I'm sorry, but there's no help for it. There's only one white man alive who could find his way from here to Homar Town. He's as near dying as a man of that sort can be. If he had an ounce of strength left in him he'd take you as he promised. Well, he can't, that's all about it."

"I see."

They walked together towards the beach. Five paces in silence, then the girl said: "What are you going to do with me?"

"Land you next port."

"Where is that?"

"Cape Town."

"You couldn't—land me somewhere nearer?"

"No, have to obey my owners. This check was a concession, y'know." He loathed conversation, but his innate gentility demanded something further. "I'll see you don't get charged nothing extra. I've got friends in Cape Town, you can stay with them. 'N'month or two you'll be able to get a ship of some sort 'll take you back to the north side of this place. You can get to Homar Town from there. Much more sensible way, there's a track of sorts."

"You say—a month or two?"

"Yes, two or three months."

"Oh."

"Well, you may strike lucky. You might get a cattle-boat just going out a week after we berth."

He knew that she was disappointed. He did not realize that in all but physical fact she was weeping, crying with a child's piteous cry of despair. Two years of training, two years of bottled-up enthusiasm, the long voyage, the first sight of the island, and now, within twenty miles of her objective, frustrated.

She said in a breathy, controlled voice: "I suppose there isn't a native who could take me? That boy in the hut, he looked quite docile."

"Docile and daft. You couldn't trust a native on this island to take you fifty yards."

He turned to the sailor, closing the matter.

"Here, Flock, you'll have to go back to the hut and get the lady's luggage."

The girl interrupted.

"Just let me go first. I unpacked some things. I shall have to do them up again. You can be getting Captain Hobartson on the boat. I'll shout when I'm ready."

"All right," said Gerrish. To Flock: "Mustn't go till the lady's things are packed." (He was popular for his jeux d'esprit.)

Hobartson was still sleeping, lying quite still on the sand but muttering audibly. The two men lifted him again, waded into the water, treading very carefully on the loose shingle, and by delicate manipulation got him into the bottom of the boat, head and shoulders on the floorboards, legs over one thwart.

"Be awk'rd rowin', sir," Flock said.

"Yes."

They arranged a coat under the sleeping man's head and waded back to the shore.

"Ladies take a lot of time packing," said Gerrish, throwing himself on the sand and filling his pipe.

"You're right, sir!" Flock gave the tremendous laugh which he kept specially for the skipper's witticisms. "Thank y' sir," taking a fill from Gerrish's pouch.

Courteously but impatiently they waited for ten minutes. Then Gerrish, standing up, looked at the sky and cursed elaborately.

"Y'know," he said, "if we don't get right away from here in less than an hour there's no knovin' what sort of a mess we'll be into. This isn't a cruisin' sort of coast."

"Urng!" said Flock, and spat generously on the sand.

"Come on," said Gerrish, starting to walk towards the hut.

Inside they found neither girl nor baggage. A sheet had been torn from a notebook and pinned

with Hobartson's knife on to the rough table. A message was scrawled in pencil:—

Captain Gerrish. The native boy is taking me to Homar Town. I pray you not to trouble yourself, I grieve to cause you anxiety, but I feel that I am wanted in Homar Town, towards which my heart has been turned for so long. God will care for me. Thank you for bringing me ashore and for all your kindness to me. I shall pray for the speedy recovery of Captain Hobartson.

S. THOMPSON.

The forest that covered two-thirds of the island stretched one mile-broad arm to within a hundred yards or so of the shore. The hut had been built right on the fringe, indistinguishable, by ships which passed a mile away, from the solid wall of trunks and bush. The two men walked along the edge of the wall until they came to the only break. It was the entrance to a path, made and kept by beasts, but used occasionally by men. Along this path, to the point where it divided into four, they ran, shouting, but hearing no reply.

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It was an hour or more later that Bonidu-Bamastaputu, Son of the Slayer of Three Lions Together, moving on a more northerly track than was his wont, received the news from one of his scouts. A pale-coloured person—a woman, the messenger thought—had dropped out of the sky into the forest. She was following a home-boy.

This was bad news indeed. The island was being overrun by pale-coloured persons. There were half

a dozen or more living between Homar Town and the harbour, where the new mines were. Too many. Hitherto the south had been free. It was a matter that required prompt attention.

A two-mile circuit—the bush was too dense to be broken through in parts—brought Bonidu to the lake trail. Here, if the report had been accurate, the pale-coloured person would be coming shortly. He made his men get well back into the undergrowth, chose a more comfortable but well-concealed position for himself, and waited. He could, if necessary, devote an hour to such an important piece of business, though more amusing occupation was to be had elsewhere.

Actually his wait lasted only twenty minutes, the shadows hardly changing; little enough to tax the patience of a Bonidu. Then he saw the boy, ambling along at a jog-trot with a heavy bag in each hand, singing happily; a village boy, evidently, a home-boy of the most contemptible type, too much flogged in childhood, ready to obey anyone; they ate meat that others had killed, that sort; but it would be well, afterwards, to cut out his tongue as a safeguard. The woman followed, twenty paces behind, striding to keep up and badly out of breath. Lying full length, Bonidu put one hand back and took an arrow, then (you could not be too cautious) put it back and selected another, one which he had not yet marked with the four notches. With hardly any movement of the limbs he shifted his body two paces to the right. There he could hold his short bow upright, and only the very top would be seen above the grass.

In the time that these movements had taken

the woman had come fifteen paces nearer. She was now within very comfortable distance—he could probably pierce one ear were he so minded. Something a little more spectacular was needed to gratify Bonidu's pride in his skill. She was keeping very close to the trees on the far side, where the path was most even. Bonidu's arrow was a long one. If he waited till she was just opposite, and if he was very careful, he might be able to send it through the loose flesh below the chin and into the trunk of the tree behind, so that it held the two together. He would have a try, making sure of the neck and hoping for the trunk. It would be a good joke if he succeeded, and if not he would say that it was merely a business shot, not a sporting one.

The boy, so quickly that it seemed to be magical, dropped the bags and disappeared into the forest. Bonidu cursed him beneath his breath; the lad had ears, anyway; one of his men behind must have moved. The woman stopped dead, bewildered, and remained motionless for half a second. Then she moved on four paces and called. Bonidu was almost stupefied by her insanity; he could hardly believe that a mortal, suppose be more intelligent than the beasts, could stay the open so long after such a warning. In the next moment, surely, she would be gone. Better shoot now, perhaps, and save trouble. But he waited. The woman walked on another pace. He pulled the string full back. One more, and she was in with the trunk he had chosen. He released the arrow.

He missed, not the trunk, but the woman.

neck. The arrow stuck an inch or more into the bark and quivered there, the tail vibrating just in front of the woman's teeth. Bonidu, frightened as he had never been since childhood, stood up. A devil, some devil more powerful than any whose work he had encountered before, had turned the arrow. He knew the arrow was a good one—his arrows were always good. He had released it with a flick of the fingers that felt right. No ordinary cause could have prevented it from hitting so easy a mark. What was he to do now? What sacrifice could he make? His own men might kill him—even a leader of his reputation could suffer the reward due to such ludicrous incompetence. And now he was standing up on his feet, a target for the whole world, folly crowning folly. He would send a second arrow, but—"Bonidu had to use two arrows, at ten paces, and he had to stand up." He must swagger. He must pretend that the miss was the joke. It was swagger or nothing. He walked forward.

The woman was standing quite still. Bonidu, with his scant knowledge of European feature, did not know that her face was any but the normal fair. Nor could he know that there was a tremor in her voice when she turned to him and spoke.

"You're a poor shot," she said. It was the first thing she thought of, and as she spoke English words did not matter. The two looked at each other, silent, both frightened, for a few moments. Bonidu's men had come out of ambush and were advancing slowly behind him. Bonidu was conscious—curiously, for the fact had never struck him before—that he was not wearing any

clothes. The girl's mind was a jumble of emotions and prayers, uppermost the wild effort to think of something that she could say and would be understood. At length she said in English: "There's no reason why you should harm me." Her brain becoming quieter, she went on in Portuguese ("Portuguese is the official language of the island"), "I want to get to Homar Town." Bonidu stared blankly. He was conscious of the men behind him grinning. How could he swagger best? He must do something surprising, unexpected. They might think then—he had managed the pose before—that he was man-with-big-things-inside-the-stomach. The girl had taken from some gap in her clothes what Bonidu recognized as a book. (He had seen a book before, in Harbour Town.) She was looking at it closely, manipulating it with her finger. Perhaps all pale-coloured persons were devil-persons.

She addressed him then, haltingly, in dialect, one word at a time, carefully guiding her pronunciation by manuscript notes in the margin. "Me—to travel—Homar Town," she said, and repeated the words several times. She felt cooler now.

Bonidu, who was frightened, and who, like all hunters, was a very religious man, took her to Homar Town.

§

Captain Hobartson, waking once again, said: "You must take me—back to the island. I promised I would—take—the missionary—to Homar.

I've got to—finish the job.” But his work was finished already. Only ten minutes later, as an arrow flew past a woman's face and stuck, quivering, in the trunk of a tree, the explorer died.

Farther away still, at that moment, an elderly draper was showing to his neighbour, who kept a shop on the other side of Holborn, a banner which he had made. It was to be hung right across the street from one upper window to the other.

“Simple,” he said, “simple and appropriate, I think.”

“Yes,” the other agreed, as he unwrapped the cloth and read letter by letter: “FIFTY YEARS. GOD BLESS OUR QUEEN.”



PART I

FAREWELL TO SÃO MAHARO

" . . . that I have any real answer to make. I can hardly tell you how wretched my heart is, as I think of poor darling Flora passing over with me, her only kin, thousands of miles away. The thought that you were constantly with her and caring for her at the End is the only one which softens my wretcheuness. You are right when you say that I should not have left you to do it all.

"But it is so hard to know what is His will! On my last furlough eight years ago I was full of happiness at being with you and Flora again, but deep down I was aching to be back here. You see, when I am not here there is no one; even Sidney, my 'curate,' is little good when he cannot ask me questions. I suppose I should not say this, it sounds as if I was being boastful. But I don't mean it like that. It is just that being the only European here who has anything to do with the natives beyond wages and taxes I feel that so much depends on my being here. Thousands of people would be much better than I am, but there must be someone. The Tulasus are capable of wonderful development, but they need someone belonging to a wiser race to keep them up to the mark. They will do for generations. Morality as we know it is a new

thing to them. They are not strong enough to keep to it unless there is someone with them who has grown up with the King of Morality. There still doesn't seem to be anyone who is likely to come. The other fields are wider, and to those who look at them from a distance they are more important. It is right, I know, that people should go to the masses. I believe I should have gone to China if it had not been for an odd remark that Captain Hobartson made that eventful evening in the Woolcombers' Hall. But now Maharo seems so important to me that I cannot turn my eyes elsewhere. I pray always that the eyes of someone else may be turned here, too, though I don't know if it is right to pray like that when all Africa lies stretched out on the other side of the water.

"I am afraid that sometimes I do feel a little bit proud. The site of this village wasn't even cleared when I came to Maharo. Well, you wouldn't mistake it for a Yorkshire village, but nearly all the houses are watertight, many are decently ventilated, and there is even a sanitation system of sorts. The Tulasus think that London, which I have talked about sometimes, can be no finer. I wonder if it will be a good thing when the motion pictures come along to give them different ideas.

"But I am beginning to talk about my own affairs in a way I should not, for I do realize that without His grace I could have done nothing. But if ever you do find anyone who wants good work, do tell them about Maharo. I believe the Society would find the money somehow if they could find the volunteer.

"I seem to have got a long way from where I

started, but I want you if you can, dear, to realize why it was that I was not with Flora when she was taken. Perhaps you cannot understand, I see how hard it is for you, but I know you will try.

"Yes, I shall come to Wakefield when I am in England again, if I can find a little money. I suppose the railway fares are as high as ever, but now that so many people have motor cars I believe I might find someone to take me. You know how I long to see you again. But it cannot be just yet. I must stay here till someone else comes, God giving me strength. It is foolish to talk of such things, but do you know I should rather love to be buried in Maharo; I feel that I belong to it more than to anywhere else, more even than to dear Wakefield.

"There are some bits of news which I should be very grateful for when you are writing again. Is Mr. Russell still alive? I should like to know . . ."

A high-pitched voice shouted: "Mother!" Miss Thompson (letters from the Society began "Dear Dr. Thompson," but she herself regarded the honorary Sheffield degree with puzzled amusement) looked out of the window, and seeing no one called: "Is that you, Peter?" She was not certain if she had guessed rightly, but Peter was inclined to devilry and hiding was frequently the manner of his wit.

Silence for a few seconds, then the voice answered: "Yes!"

"Walk along in, silly!"

"I can't!"

There was a plaintive note in the voice, but Miss

Thompson did not realize it. Her mind was dodging hither and thither. The letter must be finished some other time, it had already taken more than the half hour allotted. She had hoped to do a few minutes' work on the Two-River village plan--the job had been shelved for a fortnight--before preparing for to-morrow evening's service. Even now she might squeeze in ten minutes if she left Elsa to do the ironing by herself. Elsa would grumble, of course, but Elsa's feelings could always be softened afterwards—it simply meant getting up a few minutes earlier and laying the breakfast for her. What about Elsa's wages? Oh, that was to-morrow. Or was it? She had to look at her diary. Yes, to-day was Wednesday. Sidney had gone to Lake Village on Monday. The letter would have to reach Harbour Town by Saturday morning, though the ship might not be there till three days after that. It had been late the last two times——

“Mother!”

“Come here, I'm busy!”

“I can't.”

She would have to go and find him, but this must not happen again. Tidying as she went—Elsa could not be made to realize that medicine bottles had to go in the cupboard—she passed through the welcome-room and out into the road.

“Where are you?”

“Here, mother.”

The voice was quieter now, meant for her ears only. It came from behind a clump of palms, and turning her head in that direction Miss Thompson caught sight of a patch of blue silk, which was the prized adornment of Peter's stomach.

"I'm too busy to play now," she said, joining him.

"I don't want to play either."

"Then why didn't you come in, instead of calling?"

"Not allowed to."

"Not allowed to! Who says you mustn't?"

"High Man. He says you're his enemy. He says you told the collector that he had more beasts in the field behind the trees."

"Yes, I did. Your father forgot to tell him, so I had to."

"High Man says that the collector is a wicked thief."

"But you know what I have told you about being honest. What does honest mean?"

"I know. But High Man says that he will flog me if he sees me with you any more."

He was talking rather abstractedly, looking sharply to right and to left all the time. With one arm he pulled Miss Thompson towards him, hoping that the trees would hide them both. Anyone passing who saw them might say something. Just for the moment the most important thing was not to be seen. When some arrangement had been made he could see her often, one way and another, after nightfall. But if this meeting was reported there would be no chance. He might be tied up till rains.

Satisfied, for a moment, that they were not being observed, his slow mind came back to the special urgency of his message; it was so complicated, but he knew she would be patient.

"Mother, don't go away," he said, holding her wrist.

"Well, I can't stop long. I've got so many things to do."

"But this is more important."

"What is?"

"I was fishing in Narrow River. I went quite down to Lalominchu's place. I spoke to Lalominchu. There is some trouble. He was very angry. He is going to drink a great deal of brandy and then bury someone still living. I could not hear who it was. I knew you would not like it, so I came to tell you."

Miss Thompson hesitated for several moments. The matter was serious, of course—Peter was a reliable youth within his limits. It would mean leaving a great deal of work, and it was possible that Lalominchu would not do the murder, after all; besides, she could not possibly run about to act as policeman whenever there were rumours of an impending murder. She had learnt, long before, that to do this made all other work impossible. But Lalominchu was a special case; she had always hoped that he would one day be a power for good. His lapses had been less frequent of late; he had been running straight for three months now. If she caught him just as he was slipping it might make all the difference. And it might possibly be Nuwova with whom he was angry. It was sad to think of Nuwova in danger, such a good mother, so Christian in spirit. The old man out at Rhinoceros-meet ought to be visited, he was in a bad way; but he was waiting quite calmly for death, always repeating to himself the few lines she had taught him. It would be much better for him to die than Nuwova. Marian was in no great danger, if her master remem-

bered the physic. Elsa could not cook the meat, but that could be done before breakfast. . . .

"Can you take me?" she asked at length.

"Yes, Mother. It will be dark, and few go along Narrow River at this time."

"Very well, I will meet you at the crossing place almost directly the sun is gone. That will be quite soon. Then we must go very quickly."

"I shall be waiting."

He put his face against her hand, his own special sign of affection, darted across the open space, and disappeared. "I must give him something for a new garment," Miss Thompson thought. . . .

She ran back into the house, and started to gather papers and put them away in the cupboard. Then she sat down suddenly and was quite still for two minutes. It was the best thing to do, she had found, when that queer giddy feeling came on. If she tried to fight it she felt bad for many hours afterwards, but if she sat still it passed off, leaving only a cold, stiff feeling behind the chest. Elsa stumped into the room. She was still in tolerably good humour, rejoicing over the gift of a European white apron, which she wore over her native dress, and which, dirty as it already was, made her look darker than any other woman in the village.

"Mother is having her giddy time," she observed amiably, slamming a tray of crockery on the table. "Mother will be able to speak again soon." ("I seem only to have succeeded in teaching Elsa the worst habits and mannerisms of the European domestic servant," Miss Thompson had once written to a friend.)

"I have to go a little journey, Elsa," Miss Thomp-

son said at length. She still dared not move, but she found herself able to speak softly, only moving her lips very slightly. "I want you while I am gone to——"

"Mother can speak now."

"——to get on with as much as you can. You must tidy the welcome-room, and when the people come give them books. I hope I shall be back before long to attend to them."

"Mother all right again now?"

"Yes, I shall get up in a minute. If Rosemary comes she can take off some of the bandages. Tell her that she must not do anything more without me, unless I am very late. I shall probably be back in time to put on the bandages. If I'm not she must bandage again as best she can, but not without washing. The new bottle of iodine is in the cupboard, at the back of the second shelf. Tell Rosemary that she must be careful about using the cotton-wool. My scissors are in my work-drawer. You must give Prince his supper, don't forget. And if I'm not back you had better go round and see that all the snake-wire is in position." (She had got up and was talking now through the bedroom door as she put on her hat.) "No, silly girl, you're not likely to meet any snakes as you go round. I haven't seen one for weeks, except one tree-winder. There's a paper just inside my Bible with a list of references. If you have time I should like you to find as many of the places as you can and mark them. That will save me time to-morrow. You will be able to do that if you do the rest of your work quickly. I might be able to let you have extra home-time to-morrow."

"Mother is not going to be very late? Elsa will be frightened and go home."

"No, I probably shan't be late. But you mustn't be a silly girl." She was at the door. "What's the good of praying to Jesus to look after you if you don't trust him? You won't forget to fill a pot for me, will you, there's a good girl, I shall have to have some supper when I get back. And don't forget your prayers, will you? . . ."

§

It was quite dark when she reached the crossing-place, two miles' walk from the village, and a mist hung over the river. She had wrapped a piece of thin muslin round her face, so that it covered her mouth and nose; her theory, which she had invented herself thirty years before and now believed to have come out of the tropical medicine handbook, was that this muslin was ample protection against mist-poison; so great was her faith that she did not even trouble to vomit after a night river-journey, as the natives did scrupulously. Peter was squatting on the hard mud, thinking his own deep thoughts, and preventing the canoe's escape by occasionally tugging the nose with his toes.

"Ready, Mother?" when he saw her.

"Yes, you must paddle very hard. Shall I help?"

"No, only one paddle."

Kneec-deep in the water he held the canoe while she arranged herself in the bows.

"All right?"

"Yes."

Her slim body left little room between the fore-strut and the up-curved keel, but she was used to the position. By twisting adroitly she raised one foot, which had slipped into the water, and took off her stocking. She worried little about her own health, but she had learnt the danger of damp feet at the same time as the Ten Commandments, and respected both equally. The water began to gurgle joyfully, almost drowning the plop of the paddle cutting in. Only this gave the sense of motion, except when the river turned sharply and she could feel one side of the canoe press for a moment against her hip. Through the mist she could see overhanging trees vaguely, nothing else.

"Cannot go faster, too dark," Peter said.

"I can't think how you can steer at all."

"Peter has been this way before."

She felt very drowsy, but it might be dangerous to go to sleep in the mist. She began to count the little plops, reckoning by rhythm rather than sound, occasionally finding that she was out of time. Two hundred and seven, two hundred and eight, or was it three hundred? How many plops to Lalomitchu's place? It must be about four miles, but the sketch-map she had once made did not show the windings of the river accurately. So tantalizing that they could not go faster. Nuwova might be dying, dying under torture, at this minute. But Peter would go faster if he could. He was as strong and clever as any paddler in Maharo.

She thought she saw something dark going alongside the canoe. Probably the shadow. But could it be a shadow, coming always on the right side,

however they turned? It was not worth worrying, Peter would have his eyes open; but: "Is that dark thing anything?" she asked at last.

"Yes." He was pulling the paddle through the water with sharp, powerful strokes, hardly breaking the surface as he dipped it, hardly raising it above the surface as he flicked it forward, his eyes ever on the near darkness in front, but darting again and again to one side, his brain moving somnolently and rhythmically with the paddle. "Yes, it's an old fellow. I think it's the one I saw this afternoon."

"Is he angry?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. I think that he will be tired soon. Perhaps he is only playing."

The mist thinning a little they began to move faster, but the dark shadow still kept abreast, a silent, tireless competitor. They went side by side for the next half-mile or more, then the crocodile, as though playfully and with an easy roll of his body, touched the side of the canoe.

"We must stop his play," Peter said. "Have you anything hard?"

"I've got my boot."

His experiment had made the creature bolder, and he was close beside the canoe now, moving as though lashed to it.

"That will do. I would use my paddle, but I can't reach his head, and I don't want to stop. Just a knock on the head. Be careful of your hand."

She stretched forward and struck the scaly head twice with the heel of the boot. The crocodile whipped round, turning the canoe broadside and

nearly capsizing it. Then he swam away downstream, in a swift, graceful motion.

"It was wrong to strike twice," Peter said, "he might have eaten your hand."

Clearer now, and the trees on both sides of the stream had fallen away, leaving interminable banks of rushes to mark the course. The plop, plop, of the paddle sounded more rapidly and a little more noisily. Miss Thompson felt herself lifted a little higher at the beginning of the strokes and heard grunts from behind. The stream was narrower now, and twisted still more sharply, but the canoe, never changing its uncanny pace, followed it as though moving on a line. The distant view ahead was bounded by a blurred horizon which fell lower whenever the boat swung left; and at last, dipping suddenly, it revealed a tiny light. The light was a little nearer each time they saw it. A mile further on, by the distance of the stream, Peter turned the boat sharply, jumped out, and dragged the nose on to a bank of soft sand. From the direction of the light they heard a cry.

"If he's very bad," Miss Thompson said, panting as she ran over the uneven logs and brush, "you must get behind and knock him on the head. Not hard, but enough to keep him from doing anything, see?"

"Yes, Mother." Simple instructions of this sort he grasped quickly.

They were met by a man ten yards from the hut. He said: "Go away, Lalominchu does not want people here." As Miss Thompson pushed past him he seized her arm and repeated the words. "Lalominchu will kill people," he added. He was very

frightened, being superstitious in his attitude towards drunkards.

"Be careful of old fellows," said Peter, "there are angry ones about. They will go over the ground this season."

The warning was enough. Of crocodiles and drunkards Lalominchu's aide-de-camp preferred drunkards. (His contempt for lions was as great as Daniel's.) He made his way circuitously to the rear of the hut.

Lalominchu himself came to the entrance as they approached it. He was silent and seemed half asleep, propping himself against the wall and swinging an empty bottle with his free hand.

"Good evening, Lalominchu."

He gazed at her stupidly for a moment, then opened his mouth wide. His first words were nothing but a staccato roar. "Who are you?" he demanded at last. "I don't want people here."

"Don't be silly, Lalominchu. You know who it is—Mother."

He peered forward, leaning his head as far as his precarious balance would allow him.

"I know who you are," he shouted suddenly, "you're the white female mud-frog. You're the mud-frog woman that can't bear, with the face with the skin rubbed off. I don't want white frogs. Go away! It wouldn't be any good doing anything to you. Go away! Go away!"

He raised the bottle to the height of his shoulder and aimed at her head with a child's futility. It struck her only lightly on the shoulder. Enraged by his helplessness he stumbled forward and fell on his knees, grumbling throatily. Raising her

skirt Miss Thompson stepped over his legs and walked into the hut. "Look after him!" she said over her shoulder.

Behind the partition she found Nuwova, lying in one corner. Another woman, kneeling, was bending over her, a third was asleep by the far wall. Close to Nuwova was a bundle, a bundle of rags it appeared, but a little puddle of blood gave a clue. Nuwova was whimpering very quietly; she had lost the power to do more. There were two huge weals on one side of her face.

"Is she bad?"

The woman who was kneeling looked up sharply.

"Oh, it's you, Mother! Welcome, welcome! No, she will be all right soon. Nuwova is very strong. It was her sixth time."

"But Lalominchu has hurt her?"

"He beat her a little when he began to drink. But Naha and I stopped him. I caught his arms and Naha danced. I have put juice on the wounds. Naha got more of the blows, but she is asleep now."

The dressing took nearly an hour, but Nuwova was asleep long before it was over. Miss Thompson worked rapidly and skilfully, talking in her low, soothing voice and singing snatches she could remember of the songs Nuwova loved. She had to stop once, to get over a giddy turn; it was vexing the way these turns came so frequently now. She had forgotten for the moment about Lalominchu.

When she went back to the front room Lalominchu was sitting with his back to the wall. He was quiet again, eyes half closed, but Peter was

sitting on his legs for safety. He did not seem to notice the burden.

"Lalominchu, you are the most wicked man on this island."

He looked up, recognized her almost at once, and smiled sadly.

"Oh, Mother, welcome!" he said.

"You are a wicked, abominable man."

"Oh, Mother, I am so glad you have come. I am unhappy, I am sad, sad, unhappy. I have lost my son. My little son is dead. He did not live at all."

"He was born dead?"

"Yes, Mother. He should have been a great hunter, a great man, a greater hunter than his father, a ruler of all the beasts. But he came dead. Dead. No life at all. Oh, I am so unhappy."

"Why did you beat your wife?"

"My wife? Nuwova? I beat her just a little, yes. I was so unhappy. I was angry because she had not given my son life. He could do nothing, poor boy, poor boy. His father must beat her a little."

"Had you beaten her before?"

The hard, cutting edge of her voice frightened the drunkard into being truthful. He was evasive at first, turning his head to one side and muttering sullenly. But at length he answered.

"Yes, Mother. I beat her just a little. She was so slow. I wanted my new son and she would not make him quickly. She would not keep her food. Before, she was always a good wife and gave me strong sons. She is lazy now."

He had shaken Peter off his legs, drawn himself

back towards the wall, and was leaning forward, one hand on the ground, the other arm resting limp on Peter's shoulder. Miss Thompson, advancing a pace, took the wrist in both her hands and twisted it firmly. He could have resisted, but he did not. The physical pain, one of the few things he understood, sharpened his lax senses.

"How often have I told you that it is wicked to beat your wives when they are pregnant?"

He did not answer.

"You are feeble with drink now, and I can hold you. I think I will tell this boy to thrash you. It is the only thing to do you good."

He stiffened and his eyes grew angry, but she did not release his wrist.

"I will not be beaten by a boy," he said.

Exerting all her strength, she twisted his sinewy wrist again; the most important thing, she reflected, was to hurt him in such a way as to keep him idle a few days. The suddenness and force of the new twist took Lalominchu unawares, and the sharp pain made him cry out. He fell on his right shoulder, and lay still, whimpering.

Miss Thompson was relieved. She had not been certain whether he was drunk enough to be handled so easily. He might, having arrived at a further stage than she imagined, have sprung up and thrown all his fifteen stone of bone and muscle at her. She would have had to run, then, and for every reason she did not want to run.

"Quick," she whispered, "find something to tie him up with."

She was back in the women's room while Peter, with some skill, did the binding. The women were

all asleep, and Nuwova's breathing was quiet. She sat down between her and the bundle, wondering for a few moments whether it was right to give Christian ceremonial to a still-born child. She was very sleepy. "It cannot be wrong," she thought, and began in a low voice to recite the burial service from memory. The sight of the bundle, clumsily wound, troubled her, and she stopped. She ought to undo it and do the job more neatly, but she was too tired. She took off her coat and wrapped it round, tucking in the ends and tying it carefully. That was better, but blood still came through in wet patches. There was nothing in the room she could use. Persuading herself that the air had grown warmer she took off her thick petticoat and used this as a final wrapping. Then she put on her dress again and finished the burial service. Lalominchu's man would do the burying in the morning.

Lalominchu, tightly bound, was making no other sound than a heavy snore. He might or might not be asleep.

"He can't move until somebody unties him," Peter said, rather proud of his handiwork.

"Good."

She felt a primitive desire to carry out her threat and let Peter give the helpless man a thrashing. But she was no Kantian believer in punishment. The best thing was for him to wake up with a headache and find himself unable to move. By good fortune one of his wives would have to undo him, and the humiliation would be the best punishment possible. It would probably make him repentant. Lalominchu was a child in his moods, and that was why she took so much trouble with him. Long since

she could have had him in an African prison, but that would have been to throw away partially good material. Besides, that was not Miss Thompson's method.

"We must take Nuwova away, she is very sick."

Peter could have managed the task single-handed, had Nuwova's weight been the only obstacle; maturity comes early to the Tulasus, and at sixteen a boy has all but his full strength. But Nuwova was in no condition to be slung over one shoulder. The preparation of a rough stretcher took a few minutes, and then the journey to the water's edge had to be done in easy stages. Miss Thompson thought that she had not lost any of the power of her limbs, but she had admitted in one of her letters, "I have found some difficulty lately in *commanding* my strength. My muscles are rather disobedient, and sometimes I have to give them my orders twice before they will take any notice." She was breathless and perspiring when they reached the river, and although the cold air chilled her when the effort ceased she was forced to sit down and rest. "Perhaps I should not have given up my petticoat," she thought, "but I felt that I must make that bundle look less neglected."

Lalominchu's long canoe lay in the water close to Peter's. In this they placed Nuwova so that she lay with her back flat—her legs had to be raised. She hardly woke, even when they were arranging her in the canoe. ("Perhaps I gave her a drop more than I should have.") They tied the ends of the two canoes together.

Returning, the pace was much slower, though they travelled with the stream; besides resisting

the water the trailing canoe swung badly, and though Peter took his corners wide it constantly caught its high stern in low-falling branches. Miss Thompson knew little of the progress. In the leading canoe she sat further back than she had done on the way upstream, her head on Peter's legs. The cold kept her awake for a time, but the blood in her head seemed to be boiling. Soon she was aware of movement only, of the trees passing slowly overhead and making the stars go in and out. Her eyes hardly closed, but she dreamed horribly, and again and again the figure of Lalominchu, struggling to free himself, took the place of the boy paddling, reared itself over her, visible behind the stars. When Peter woke her, she climbed out of the boat clumsily and fell into the water. Every part of her body was shaking by the time they had lifted Nuwova out of the long canoe and placed her on the bank.

She was tempted to sit down and rest for a few minutes, but realized that this would be dangerous.

"I shall go on home," she said. "You must wake up some people and get them to carry her. Tell them it is my orders. You must see that they are careful; they must make a stretcher of some sort."

She walked with her long stride; it seemed to require very little effort, but her legs took her from one side of the path to the other in a drunken fashion, and twice she narrowly saved herself from colliding with trees. Reaching the house at last she leant against the table in the welcome-room and called for Elsa. There was no reply. She found the girl's room empty. The breakfast had not been laid.

The first thing to do, she knew, was to strip off her

wet things. But mechanically she started to attend to things that caught her eye. The patients had all gone, fortunately. She hoped that Rosemary had attended to them properly. There were bandages lying about, a basin half full of bloody water, and a bottle of iodine with the cork nowhere to be seen. Rosemary was a good child, she would learn everything but tidiness.

She was on her way to the bedroom when her eye fell on the Bible, and she opened it. None of the passages had been found. Elsa, little goose, must have run away as soon as her mistress was out of sight. With a wobbling finger she turned up the first reference. "No, I must take off my things before I do anything else," she thought. But she was filling a kettle when four women came in bearing Nuwova.

"How lucky that Elsa's bed is free," Miss Thompson thought. It was twenty minutes later, when she had satisfied herself that the patient was comfortable and asleep, that she at last took off her clothes, wrung them out, and hung them across the kitchen. Then she had to sit still for a few moments, wearing only her mackintosh, before she could walk back to the bedroom. In bed she felt warm all over, and would have liked to throw off one of the blankets. The figure of Lalominchu came again, still bound, down through the ceiling; but a cloud of blackness rolled over and blotted him out.

§

Shortly after sunrise Elsa was running barefoot down the hill. She still argued to herself that her

flight was only reasonable, but she was ashamed and frightened. When she reached the house she went straight to the day-room and was dismayed to find that the table had been laid. Experience told her, then, that an early apology was advisable. She knocked at the door of the bedroom, and hearing no answer went in. Miss Thompson was asleep, her arms stretched out over the side of the bed. It reminded Elsa of a picture of the Crucifixion. She had kicked off the bedclothes. Her face was very white.

§

Jornay Doctor Jornay to some, and Captain Jornay to others (rightful holder of both titles in past lives), came ashore at Harbour Town and walked up what was called 'The Street'. He had business with Salgucz, a small matter, concerning fibre. Jornay had the name of a Liverpool firm in his cabin-books but he was widely known as one who "sailed private," and he traded in fifty commodities. The list was a matter of speculation in the Cape and island ports—there was no more evidence than rumour, but it was known that ships went across the water somehow and Jornay was not the kind who refused the advantages of a social outlaw's status. They said that he dined with Customs officers more frequently than was proper or necessary.

He was accosted by a Tulasu boy.

"No," he said, "it's quite light, I can carry it myself."

The boy stood square in front of him, frowning

and anxious. He expected a cut from Jornay's stick, and was near to getting one.

"Captain Jornay," he said.

"Yes, that's my name, get out of the way."

He strode on, but the boy started to jog beside him. Behind the dark, childish face, an undeveloped brain was struggling to recall the few Portuguese words that he had been learning from a half-caste sailor most of the morning. He got them out at last.

"Thompson. White lady. Very ill."

Jornay stopped. He had met Miss Thompson from time to time, perhaps once in three years, when he was visiting the island. He had been very rude once—a chance encounter in Homar Town when he was slightly drunk and she was holding service in the open. The incident had troubled him, as far as he could be troubled, for Miss Thompson's behaviour to him was always that of the first lady in the land entertaining a distinguished traveller. The remnant of his decency responded to such treatment.

Peter, his brain running nicely now that it was started, uttered his second sentence.

"No white people near."

"Oh!" said Jornay. His eyes, hitherto fixed on Peter's ear, shifted their direction and found the boy's face. "Miss Thompson's ill, is she? Where?"

"Thompson, white lady," said Peter.

"Yes, where is she?"

"Thompson, white lady."

"Oh, damn the boy!" He could ask for his drinks in a score of African lingoos, but it was not worth his while to memorize the peculiar grunt of a

goddam little island like São Maharo. He thought for a few moments. What was the name of the smelly little hut-outbreak on the north side which the woman used as her preaching headquarters? He had only been there once—Miss Thompson's suspicions had spoilt business prospects in that quarter.

"Ganoo?" he tried, then remembered. "Gahuga?"

He said the word several times, and at last Peter responded.

"Yes, Gahuga."

Well, the boy might merely be parroting in his obtuse way, but that was the name, he felt sure, or something like it.

"Is there such a thing as a horse on this mud-spot?" he asked, and then, realizing the futility, cursed and went off to find one.

Yes, there was a horse, he had brought a couple of geldings over himself a year or so back; unless they had both died, as any self-respecting animal would. He made his way to Salguez' store, where he received the necessary information. A few minutes later he was riding slowly inland. The boy ran ahead, singing.

§

"... within one month, if you don't get out of this swamp."

"You said the same thing in exactly the same words thirty years ago, or was it fifty years? And Doctor Mackenzie used to say the same thing before that."

Miss Thompson's voice was very thin, but she

thought she was making it sound ordinary. Elsa, alive to any excitement, had somehow managed to report Jornay's approach before his horse was in sight, and a great deal of stage work had been done in the short interval. With the help of two women who were called in from the road Miss Thompson had got herself into a sitting position; an effort, but she was fairly comfortable with the pillow propped against a sugar-box. Elsa had arranged the bed-clothes with more than her usual skill, had placed medicine and a thermometer on the table, had found the only work of fiction in the mission-house (Emma) and rested it open on the bed. It was impossible, in a few moments, to conceal the disorder of the room or the dirtiness of the bed-clothes. But a man wouldn't notice that, and a clean pillow-case had appeared somehow.

"When you first told me I was dying you were a doctor," Miss Thompson went on, "and then I didn't believe you."

"I don't want to talk about that," Jornay said stiffly. "You'll admit that this is the first time I've found you in bed——"

"Rather improper, I consider——"

"——and you're not the sort who goes to bed with a slight toothache."

It was very, very nice, Miss Thompson thought, to see a white person again. It made her feel better than she had been for days—perhaps she should have tried the sitting-up position before. She even found herself smiling.

"So as usual you think I'm dying. Well, it's very kind of you to tell me. What am I dying of this time?"

Jornay drew his teeth back over his lower lip, first on the left, then centre, then right.

"It won't be possible to say which of them you died of."

"Them?"

"Ailments, afflictions and diseases generally. I've forgotten m'books, so I can't give you a black-and-white ticket. But in the first place, you've had hossi for years. Bound to."

"What do you mean, 'bound to'?"

"No Europeans—bar Portuguesè, who are as near niggers as dammit—have ever lived on this island for more than a few months—twelve at the outside. Then they get hossi and either die or go home and get all right. And they, mind you, stick to the harbour neighbourhood, where there's some sort of disinfectant in the shape of a sea wind now and then. I believe there was a cracked schoolmaster went in to Homar Town once; but they tell me he tried native food, so that proves nothing either way. But as to living on the north side, well, beggin' y'pardon, it's pure bloody lunacy."

"That may be. But Yorkshiremen rush in where rum-dealers fear to tread. I've done it for a good many years."

She was beginning to feel exhausted again, and wished he would go away. It was so pointless, all this talking and swearing.

"Yes, and can you tell me that you've ever slept a decent sleep all through the night?"

"Well——"

"And can you tell me that you've ever woken up without a nasty taste in your mouth? And that

you've never felt all hot and cold and giddy somewhere about midday?"

"I don't know what all this——"

"It hasn't, I was only telling you. You asked me what was wrong with you, and I'm givin' you a full account. The main trouble now is that you've got some form of pneumonia——"

"My dear man, what nonsense! I know enough about the normal symptoms of pneumonia myself to know——"

"The normal symptoms, perhaps you do. But you're not a normal subject. You're like a cat with nine lives."

"Yes, and I am going to spend the last three of them here without any interference from you. I can paddle my own canoe. Peter can paddle—he's the best paddler on the island. It's a very swoopy feeling sometimes turning sharp round the corners, But Nuwova had to have her medicine. I was short of a bandage, they didn't send enough in the last box. What's the man's name? Lalo—Lalo—Lalosomething. Oh, why can't I remember the name? Why can't I remember? Why can't I remember? Why . . ."

Jornay went to the welcome-room, and after a little searching in the cupboard found the bottle he wanted. He poured a little into the bottom of a teacup, thought for a moment, and then poured a little more.

No one in Gahuga, it appeared, had a single word of Portuguese. There was nothing for it but to go back to Homar Town. When he arrived there he decided that it would save time in the end to go back to Harbour Town, and though the light

had almost gone he rode on. Doris would be useful—he could bustle about in a crisis and as like as not knèw a sentence or two of the Maharo lingo.

It was not the first time that Jornay thanked the powers that Doris was a Plymouth Brother. It was tedious to hear a sermon on morality from one's mate every few days, particularly when one's business was not the sort that is sponsored by the Young Women's Christian Association; the joke had long since grown stale to his palate; but dependable sobriety was worth rubies. He knew, when he heard the shouting in Salguez' store, that Doris would not be there, though every other man of his crew probably was; and sure enough, Doris was lying in his own bunk, reading aloud to himself from the Pilgrim's Progress.

"Why the hell aren't you on shore?" Jornay asked. "What's the good of me telling Frank to stop aboard?"

"I am not a drinking man," said the mate, "neither am I interested in ladies."

"Well, you've got to be interested in one lady _____"

"I'm sorry——"

"Oh, yes, you will be. In the first place I say you blasted well are to be, and in the second place you'll like this lady. She's a Bible-spouter like yourself. She's better than you are. She'll Bible-spout you under the table if you give her half a chance. Can you make the grunt of this island?"

"Can I speak in Tulasu? Yes, a little."

"Well, come along and find someone and speak it."

From a group of loiterers Jornay picked out a tall, lean man whom he thought he had seen before.

Yes, with Salguez. He was a man who lived inland and brought down vegetables of some sort to be sold to any ship that called.

"Tell him you want to speak to him," Jornay said. "Don't keep the lamp shining right on his face. You're frightening the poor devil. Ask him if he knows Gahuga."

It took Doris a long time to get an answer to this question. The farmer was nervous and voluble; still worse, he knew a dozen words of Portuguese, and never lost an opportunity to show off his education. Eventually, however, it was established beyond all doubt that the man knew Gahuga, that he was acquainted with more than one inhabitant of that village ("the white woman's village," he called it), and that he was prepared to tell scandalous anecdotes about them.

"I suppose you'll have finished chattering before it gets light?" Jornay asked.

"Will you please have patience, Mr. Jornay? He says he knows Gahuga."

"Well, it's taken him a hell of a time to say it. Now ask him if there's only the one track from Homar Town."

At length: "Yes, only one track, he says."

"Is there any canoe-way between there and the coast?"

Doris translated the question. The farmer became still more voluble. Doris, unwilling to admit the limitations of his Tulasu, listened as though he understood every word, but at last was defeated. He took the farmer by the arm and led him to a place on the jetty where a ship's lamp threw a large patch of brown light.

"Now," he said, putting his cap on the ground, "Gahuga." Then he took off his scarf, rolled it up, and placed it a few feet away from the cap. "Harbour Town."

The farmer understood, and was rather pleased with this exposition of the novel science of cartography.

"Rivers," said Doris. "Where?"

The farmer rose to the occasion and began to trace with his finger the course of the stream that flowed near Gahuga. While Jornay grumbled and stamped with impatience he faithfully followed all the bends he could remember; his peregrinations took him right across the island, and had his work been strictly to scale would have led the river far out into the sea. He managed, nevertheless, to come back to the scarf.

"What we've got, then," said Jornay, "is that there's unbroken water between here and Gahuga—unless this fellow's lying or daft or both, which I strongly suspect. And as far as I can see a stream near Gahuga flows about due north and joins another one which is a tributary of the river coming out here. It may be a hundred miles all the way round, and there's probably a dozen waterfalls n every mile, but that's a separate story. I suppose you don't know the lingo for a waterfall?"

Doris did not. Both made the sounds and actions of water falling, but it was of no avail. Jornay, losing patience altogether, dismissed the man with a pair of scissors—he bought stocks of these in Johannesburg for such occasions.

"God knows I don't think much of your Tulasu," he said, "but I'll have to try you again to-morrow.

You've got to get up early and come to this place Gahuga with me. If your talk doesn't work there you'll have to use a bit of a rope, see? We've got to make these blacks do things."

§

Jornay made them, as only he could have done. It needed two long canoes, one for Miss Thompson, one for himself and Doris, with three men to paddle each. Miss Thompson herself made no protest; the drug had not finished working, and fever worked with it. She asked again and again: "What is happening? Why is everything moving?" but each time she was satisfied with the answer: "It's all right, everything's all right." The canoes were helped by the current, and the long journey only took twenty-seven hours. A procession of smaller boats, carrying representatives of half the families in Gahuga, followed all the way. The news had reached Homar Town, and travelled from there into scattered villages. A large crowd was waiting at the harbour long before the turn of the tide would bring the procession down the last piece of its journey.

The funnel of the *Ego of Africa* was belching a black cloud which the wind carried nearly to the horizon. The second mate had forced a grumbling crew to work, and she was trim, in the sense of that word which is accepted in a cargo-steamer trading on the fringe of the law. The creak of the mooring-ropes said that she was impatient to get away on the full tide.

The canoes were brought in at a place, half a mile

up the estuary, where a lane branching from The Street suddenly became shingle and then water, and where most of the fishing craft were moored, each boat tied to its neighbour, the whole flotilla jutting far out across the little bay. It was easier, here, to transfer an invalid from boat to stretcher, and there were no steps to negotiate. Miss Thompson had slept for the last hour, and Jornay intended if possible to transfer her to the *Ego* before she woke. The difficulty was to keep back the crowd, eager to help and chattering like apes. The second mate, although he must have seen from the ship what was happening, had not the sense to send a few men to form a cordon.

Jornay was very nearly successful. The four men he picked carried the stretcher with perfect smoothness, out of the water, over the shingle, along The Street, on to the jetty. There they stood, rigid and motionless, filled with pride and a sense of responsibility, waiting for further orders; and then, for no reason unless it was a puff of sea wind or the smell of ship, Miss Thompson woke.

Short as it had been, the sleep had worked mightily in refreshing her mind, and the shock of waking in such strange circumstances gave it impulse.

"Where am I?" she asked, her voice quick and slightly imperious.

Jornay, standing a few feet away and giving directions, turned round.

"Did you jog her?" he asked fiercely.

The bearers, understanding his tone, denied by gesture. He came close to the stretcher.

"You're all right," he said, "I'm in charge."

For a moment she did not know who he was—the drug had obscured the near past. An Englishman, a grey-haired man with a handsome, hard-used face and deep eyes. Someone she had seen often, yes, of course, Captain Gerr—Gerr—Captain Jornay.

“Oh, it’s you, Captain Jornay. When did you come?”

“I came to see you the day before yesterday, don’t you remember?”

She remembered then.

“You said I was ill. I think I was a little. I’m all right now.”

She tried to sit up, but found that her limbs were slow to obey. Quite gently Jornay put his hand on her shoulder.

“You must keep still.” He bent down. “Y’know, there’s a lot of work for you to do on this island, preachin’ and convertin’ the blacks and so on. That’s so, isn’t it?”

“Yes——”

“——Well, if you want to do any more work you’ve got to have a rest-cure, see? I’m going to take you on my ship——”

“Certainly not!”

“Wait a minute! I’m going to take you with me to Delagoa, where I’m going. I can put you on a ship there that’ll take you to Tilbury——”

“I shan’t leave this island!” She was alert now, and there was force in her tone, though her voice sounded little above a whisper. “I’ve been ill before, and I get all right if I’m left to myself. There are heaps of people to look after me. And” (her voice falling still lower) “there’s no one else to look after them.”

Jornay took his eyes away from hers and stared at his thumbnail.

"I'm afraid you have no say in the matter, Miss Thompson. When I give an order it gets obeyed."

"Who are you to order me? I am the first lady on this island."

Jornay rolled his tongue round his mouth.

"I used to be an Englishman," he said, "and I haven't lost the habit of payin' regard to certain duties. As a matter 'f fact I'd take you off this place if you were a dago. I can't stay here, and I can't leave a white woman to die here by herself, with no one within miles but natives and a handful of Portuguese miners." He paused, and added: "If you're worrying about your passage from Delagoa, that's my affair. Money's no bloody—no earthly use to me. Right. Frank! where's Doris? Get four men on to this stretcher!"

"You've got no right to move me. I shall have you arrested at the first port."

The last three words were only formed by her mouth, they were inaudible; and involuntarily she closed her eyes, exhausted.

Jornay whispered to Doris: "She's got nine lives, but she's had all of 'em. We won't get her alive to Delagoa."

Jornay's sportsmanship—towards the crowd of Tulasus rather than Miss Thompson herself—made him order his men to put her down on the deck, now a foot or two above the side of the jetty and only a few feet away, instead of carrying her below at once. She could be quite warm there, lying on a pile of bedding and covered with several heavy coats. They looped two ropes round the improvised

bed to prevent her rolling into the scuppers; and she lay there in bondage, very still, her head turned towards the shore, her eyes half open.

Elsa and Peter stood side by side in the front of the crowd. Till now they had been silent, frightened, uncomprehending. It was Peter who spoke first.

"Mother, Mother, they are taking you away!"

His eyes looked for a denial, some answer, some explanation. Elsa bent suddenly and started to cry, loudly, piteously. The Tulasus weep seldom, but one woman after another in the crowd behind joined her, and presently men (tired men, they had paddled all night, or risen early to walk the whole way to the harbour) were crying too. A voice here and there was angry and protesting, but most of them knew that it was vain to argue with a white man who had taken affairs into his own hand. "Mother is leaving us, we have lost our Mother." Only those words were heard, mingled with the wailing. The woman lying on the deck could not reply. "It must be His will," she thought. "He has given me power to defy men for so long. It must be His will that I can resist them no longer."

Somewhere in the ship a bell rang. The last rope had been pulled on to the deck. So slowly that the motion could hardly be seen, the gap between deck and quay widened. Inch by inch, till it was a dozen feet away, and then a sudden silence fell on the crowd.

Miss Thompson had felt that the silence was coming. Something told her that if she tried with all her strength she could speak again, and her voice might possibly be heard. She could only manage a few words. She wanted to say: "God bless you,"

but the emotion which those three words brought would stifle them.

"I shall come back," she said, then a little louder, "I shall come back!"

The bows were swinging out, and the stern, moving slowly forward, came a little nearer to the quay. The crowd was still quiet, the silence broken only by subdued sobbing. She made another effort, a greater effort than before, and called:

"I shall come back. I SHALL COME BACK!"

§

Clear of the jetty the ship turned east, and the low huts of Harbour Town began to grow smaller almost visibly. Two men came to untie the ropes that were looped round the bed.

"Please leave me," she whispered, "a few minutes."

Riding smoothly over a quiet sea, they left her for an hour. The trees on the island had lost their colour, and the grey came nearer and nearer to the grey of the hills behind. Then São Maharo was a little blur on the horizon, a blur that sailors looked for before they turned to south south-west. Miss Thompson tried to bring up her right arm. It was too heavily loaded with coats and blankets, but even without its support she could raise her head a little, just for a moment, to see the island disappearing. Voiceless, but with her chin stiffened and her lips moving fiercely, she shouted over the water:

"I shall come back."

PART II

FAIR AND PLEASANT LAND

THE postman brought two letters, both addressed in the same handwriting—a prim, well-formed schoolmistress hand; one was registered. The maid Violet put the registered letter on a breakfast tray, carried it across the tiled hall, up the uncarpeted stairs, across the landing. She knocked very gently on the door, went into the bedroom, and put the tray down on a little table. Having pulled back the curtain she went back to the table and moved it carefully a little nearer the bed. Then she said: “Good morning’m,” and went out.

Miss Thompson lay awake for a minute or two without opening her eyes. She was no longer surprised when she woke each morning; and now the pain which hurt her mind at night until she slept lasted only a few seconds when she woke again; as reason came she thought that it was right to enjoy the simple pleasure of feeling the morning sunshine on her face and knowing what she would see when she opened her eyes. She would rather—yes, but it was not for her to choose, and it was right to be thankful.

When she raised her face towards the window the sun opened her eyes at last, and she looked out across the barn-roofs on to the soft green of the downs. Then back into the room, on to the break-

fast tray, and she saw the envelope. She let it lie for a moment, nourishing her excitement, before she stretched out her hand and took it. The letter inside was badly typewritten on cheap paper.

"Dear Dr. Thompson,—I expect by this time you are rather short of money, there must have been many things which you have had to buy since you got back. I am enclosing five pounds. I should so like to make it more, but the Society's investments have been yielding very poorly lately, and as you know, the Yan-Fusan affair has been a big drain on our resources. But you must let us know directly this is finished, and we shall see what we can do. Don't bother about accounting for every little detail, just a general statement which I can show the Auditors will do perfectly.

"We are glad to hear that you are so happy with Mrs. Benson. She is a very, very good friend to the Society, I don't know what we should do without her. I know she will keep you where you are until she feels that you are quite well enough to move. When that time comes I will make arrangements for you to go to Mrs. Fuller, unless you have other plans. Later on we may have some deputation work for you, which I am sure will be welcome to your active spirit. The great thing is to get *really* well as soon as possible

"Yours very sincerely,

"HILDA M. GRIFFIN,

"Secretary."

Five pounds. Wasn't that really more than they could spare for a non-combatant? That terrible business at Yan-Fusan must have cost a lot of money. Well, the only thing to do was to make it go as far as possible. First of all she must repay the ten shillings to Mrs. Benson. Mrs. Benson had

not called it a loan, she would probably make a fuss, but the money must be repaid all the same. Then there was Captain Jornay. "He said quite definitely that he would not take anything back," she had written to Miss Green, but she herself did not intend to let the matter stand there. If she sent him a pound—or only ten shillings—whenever her money came, she would gradually reduce the debt. The first payment would show him that she had meant what she said. Probably he would only use the money to buy more spirits to sell to the natives, but that made no difference to the principle. That left four pounds. A coat was the most important thing, except, of course, fares, for which the necessary amount must be put on one side. The rest didn't matter, but a coat was essential. The fare to London would probably be—well, she must find that out. Of course, people said that you could get things cheaper in London, if you knew where to go, but when she could get out she might find a shop in the village where the prices were reasonable, and they were certain to be honest there. The question of boots——

A knock, and the door opened slowly.

"Oh, you're awake?"

Mrs. Benson held a folded letter, which she twitched this way and that, because her fingers were seldom still. She had walked on tip-toe up the stairs and across the boards of the landing. She had turned the handle of the door very gently, and pushed it with a slight pressure. But these movements were unnatural to her. Normally, she was quick and cheerful, hating slowness and silence because they reminded her of the few scenes she

did not like to remember. "Goodness knows they are not worth what I pay for their food," she said of her poultry, "but I like to hear them making a noise in the morning." Now, seeing that Miss Thompson was awake, her briskness reappeared as if released by a touch on a button. She crossed the room, poured away the tea which remained in Miss Thompson's cup, and refilled it.

"Good morning, dear!" she said. "I hope you've slept all right, the sunshine's lovely this morning. I think, if you're well wrapped up and covered with rugs, you could sit in the garden; sugar? I always forget! there's nothing like fresh air, oh, and I have some delightful news."

Her letter—also signed "Hilda M. Green"—said: "It is rather late in the day to tell you, and really I thought I would not mention it at all, but I have to keep to my promise. You remember Gertrude Fenner, who went out to Hankow ten years ago? She is on the *Queen of the Orient*, which is due at Tilbury on Wednesday, that's to-morrow. Now it's no good your telling me that you could squeeze in another, because I know very well that you are full. I've kept my promise and that must close the matter."

Mrs. Benson, reading this, had put three fingers on her lips, little finger and thumb below her chin, elbow on the table. She remained in that attitude for just five seconds, then she took the lobe of her left ear between two fingers, gave it half a turn, and her eyes sparkled. (Only the three photographs, mounted in the same frame, laughed at this little trick of hers now.) She went into the hall and took the telephone, kneeling on the window-seat.

"Telegrams, please! Is that telegrams? Will you take a telegram to Gospel, Cent, London. Oh, my number is Horsham 707. Yes, that's right. This is the message. 'Insist entertaining Gertrude direst penalties refusal Benson.' No, Benson, B-E-N. Yes, Gertrude—rhymes with Ermyntude. That's right."

"Such a dear person, and so interesting," she said to Miss Thompson. "I remember her telling me all about the revolution, she was right in the thick of it, you know, the rising, you know, I forget what it was called. Or am I thinking of Mary Stephenson? Perhaps I am. Are you sure you wouldn't like some more bread and butter? You're looking even better to-day than you did yesterday. Yes, I'm sure you'll enjoy talking to her."

"I'm sure I shall." She was thinking—Now that it's warmer there's really no need for new gloves. I shall have to give something to Violet. I wonder what they usually give. She certainly deserves anything she gets. "I shall have to make haste and get up," she said. "Doctor Crewe said he expected to find me romping this morning."

"Oh, the doctor. I had forgotten all about him. What time did he say, half past ten? I expect he will waste my time talking half the morning. Well, he's not to push you on too fast, I won't hear of it. He thinks everyone is as well as he is. Room? My dear, there's heaps of room. I've had five guests together before now. It will just mean making this room into two, you don't mind, do you? It's the largest, you see. Oh, it's easy as winking, the rods there all ready, you see, and I've got the curtain in the ottoman, and I get the

camp-bed down from the attic. Mind? You don't know Gertrude Fenner. She would sleep on the floor of the coal shed if I let her, and sleep as soundly as you or I would in our beds. I remember her telling me that during the plague all the beds in the house were full, two in each bed, I think she said, and she slept on the kitchen table. No, don't you worry yourself, it will be quite all right."

Miss Thompson knew, however, that she was what Mrs. Benson called "Top of the Class"—she had been at the Farm longer than either of the other guests. She realized, too, that no washing was ever sent out from the Farm, and that the dining-room badly needed re-papering. "I could get someone to take my trunk in a cart," she thought, "and by resting every now and then I could walk myself. The farm cart might be available, but both the men are very busy."

§

On this, as on every other visit of Doctor Crewe, it was really Mrs. Benson who did the talking. It was her practice to say how the convalescence was progressing, what her present routine was to be, and what was to be done in the future. Crewe had long since ceased attempting to lay down his own law. Sometimes he insisted on taking a temperature, but he did not argue about the difference between his own and Mrs. Benson's findings. (Had Mrs. Benson's eyesight been better, she would have known, as he did, that her thermometer was broken and void of mercury.)

It was only by a lucky accident—the ringing of

the telephone bell—that Miss Thompson got the doctor to herself, as she had been vainly trying to do.

“I want you to tell me truthfully,” she said, “how soon can I get away from here?”

“But, my dear lady, why should you want to? I always say that Arras Farm is the most perfect spot on earth—barring my own cottage.”

“It is. Mrs. Benson is the most delightful person in the world, and one of the cleverest. But there are other tired-out people coming along. I’ve had more than my share, and I must make room for them.”

She was glancing towards the door, but the marmalade had failed to set and Mrs. Benson had been summoned to the kitchen.

“I feel ever so much better now. I think I could walk to the station.”

He looked hard at her, wondering. They all had something in common; restlessness, a kind of beautiful insanity; they all loved the Farm, and they all asked him how soon they could get away. He saw one face after another, right back to the face he could only see dimly—she lived again in all of them. Did professional duty count? Would law ever confine a gipsy?

“Walk?” he said. “What’s my Morris-Cowley for? But you must wait at least a fortnight.”

“A fortnight’s too long.”

“Or a week, at least.”

“Are you sure?”

“Where are you going to go?”

“London. The Society arranges for lodgings there. I shall be well looked after. I should like

to go to Wakefield, but—oh, by the way, Doctor, I don't like to mention it, but there's the matter of your—your account. I should like——”

“Quarter-days!” he said, rather sharply. “I can only receive my moneys on quarter-days. It would throw my accounts out otherwise. Excuse my asking,” he pointed to a ring on her finger, “is that elephant hair?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so. I used to have one myself. I was furious when I lost it. I love that kind of thing.”

“But they're as common as pebbles in Africa. They sell them to you on the quays.”

“Is that so?”

“I'll send you one when I get back. You give a boy a sixpence and he beats it down, makes the ring, and accepts the odd silver.”

Crewe rummaged in his pocket and produced a sixpenny piece.

“Don't forget!” he said.

“One minute, I believe I have one in my handkerchief-box. No, I won't take the sixpence. If you wait a minute, I'll——”

“No, don't bother. Next time I come, if you've found it, I'd be glad to have it. I would make just one condition——”

“Violet is a good girl,” said Mrs. Benson, returning, “but she's a perfect idiot over marmalade. I said distinctly boil it for half an hour, and she *thinks* it was on *at least* twenty minutes. Of course, it's like water. Would be, if I took it to the North Pole. Well, I've got some good news. My sister Lucy has just rung up to say that he's passing here

on Friday on her way to Hove, and she's going to stay for the week-end. You've never met my sister, have you? You have, of course, Doctor? Yes, she is a jolly girl, people always think she's my daughter. Good gracious no! She'll sleep with me, she always does. I don't think she'd sleep anywhere else if I asked her to."

Miss Thompson walked down to the gate with the doctor. "That much exercise will do me good," she said. Mrs. Benson had shown signs of coming too, but a man wanted to see her—he was uneasy about one of the Shorthorns.

"You will do your best for me?" Miss Thompson pleaded. "When I get away from here it means one stage of convalescence over, and that means a lot to me, besides taking the burden off Mrs. Benson's shoulders. If I stay here much longer I shall only get fidgety, and that'll put me back. Oh, no, I don't mind acting against your orders, I've never taken any notice of what doctors said, but I'd rather not. I'm going to get back within two months, whatever anyone says."

"Get back—where?"

"São Maharo."

"Oh!"

He thought about it all the rest of the morning, and again that evening as he sat in a half-lighted room in the hospital. It helped him sometimes, but more often he could have worked three times more easily without it, that incalculable and immeasurable force, the human will. Not really his subject, but always cropping up. Perhaps the newer men knew all about it. Different in men and women. Rather an interesting example of the first

psychological principle. A man's energy was always checked by reason. Perhaps that was why women went so far but so seldom. Yet there were fifty common phenomena which pointed the other way. It might make a subject for a paper for the Lewes Lister Society. Only that youngster Le Shaw would tear him up. He had these things at his finger tips. What would Le Shaw do in this case? He could theorize, of course. The point was that two weeks would be hardly any better than two days; two months, she really wanted. But then she would either defy him or put her head in a gas oven. "I shall look a fool, either way," he thought. "Perhaps if I could make Mrs. Benson talk seriously for five minutes—but she thinks I'm a fool already. I could try getting her alone——"

A voice from the bed said faintly: "Doctor."

"All right, old chap."

He rang the bell and went to the door. "Tell Matron she had better send for the parents," he whispered. He closed the door again, softly, and went back to the bed. "Of course, she can't ever get back to that São place, but if I told her——."

§

The square, stucco houses had given place to square, dirty brick houses, and the train shook more frequently, running over the points. The carriage was icy cold. Miss Thompson, fearing sickness, had chosen a corner seat facing the engine, and the window was three quarters down.

"You're sure you don't mind," the woman opposite had said. "I always say 'hat the way to

catch cold is to muffle up and breathe bad air. Fresh air is the first rule of health, that's what the doctors say, isn't it? And of course these carriages are germ-traps, aren't they? You don't know who was in them last, do you? Of course they *say* they clean them every day and use disinfectant, but I've got a brother who's in the offices at Euston and he knows. And look at the things you find. You don't find orange-peel and cigarette stumps in my sitting-room when I've cleaned it out. Of course I have to do it myself now, you can't *get* girls, no matter what you're prepared to pay. They all go into the factories. You'll tell me if you do feel cold, won't you? But I always say that it's better to be cold than to have a cold, and all this 'flu' about. Don't you think so?"

Miss Thompson had the rug over her knees and tucked behind her waist ("Return it any time, dear, it really doesn't matter a bit") but she dared not draw it up over her shoulders. "Perhaps," she thought, "I should have got the coat instead of the boots. I wonder if I gave Violet enough?" She held the *Daily Mirror* on her lap, but she had read all the captions on the first and back pages, and when she tried to manipulate it further the draught seized it viciously.

"Queer how the wind does get hold of things," the woman said.

There was a map on the other side of the carriage, on which Miss Thompson could see the names of Brighton and Victoria marked. "We must be going north, or north-east," she thought, "further away still." She looked out at the dingy houses, the posters, the factories, the long streets with trams

and buses crossing below, and she saw little huts and heavy walls of trees and a dark, narrow river. She looked at the white faces over some of the window-boxes and saw brown faces. The noise of the train changed as it went over the bridge. The speed had slackened.

"Nearly there now," the woman said. She looked out of the window, almost for the first time, and caught sight of a tug sweating up-river with four barges. "Makes you feel proud," she exclaimed suddenly.

"What?—oh yes!"

"The Thames, I mean, and London. Largest river in the world, I believe it is. It's got something British about it. Now, where did I put that umbrella?"

Miss Thompson, too, began to collect her things. She let go the newspaper, which the wind took, lifted as high as the baggage-rack, and swept underneath the seat.

"I'll get it for you!"

"No, please don't trouble. I shan't want it any more."

Her purse had disappeared, but she found it pushed down at the back of the seat. There was that, and the chocolate, where was that? Oh, of course, she was holding it, and the umbrella and the bag. And the rug. She could carry the rug over one arm, and hold the purse and the chocolate in that hand. She would have liked to put the chocolate away in the bag, but she did not care to open the bag in the presence of a stranger, and it might be difficult to shut again. The purse would have to be in the same hand as the chocolate. She could put

the bag down to get out the ticket. No, it would be better to get out the ticket now—she was so out of practice at managing a purse, she might drop all her money if she was flustered. She put the rug and the chocolate down again, and took out the ticket. She was very nervous lest she should drop it. When she had rearranged the various pieces of luggage she found that she could not remember the name of the lodgings; it was written on a piece of paper in her purse. She stood up again, again put down the rug, and at that moment the train, stopping with a slight jerk, threw her back on to the seat. The fresh-air woman, who had been fluttering round the carriage in search of a knitting-pin, caught sight of her daughter on the platform, and scrambled clumsily to the door, shouting "Nellie!" Her bag had struck Miss Thompson on the knees, but she was too excited to notice and apologize. Miss Thompson again rose unsteadily, again rearranging her things. She had to put down some of them once more to open the door, which the other woman had let slam behind her. The lock was very stiff. She had a vague idea that the train, having stopped for a few seconds, would slide back out of the station. Holding the ticket and the piece of paper firmly between two fingers which she had set aside for them, she stepped down cautiously on to the platform. A man carrying two heavy cases bumped into her, apologized vaguely and strode on. Involuntarily, she joined the stream flowing towards the barrier.

At the barrier, through which she was forced in a jostling wedge, she managed very well. She was able to free one arm and hold it up a little. The

collector took the ticket and piece of paper, then, just as she was being thrust forward out of his reach, touched her shoulder and restored the piece of paper. A policeman, a few feet away, said: "Steady!" Behind a man was saying: "I'd like to smash this blasted railway and hang all the directors." A voice close to Miss Thompson said: "Mind y'back there please!" In every direction youths were calling something about "lunch-time stairds." A Frenchwoman was talking volubly to a porter. Near her, a woman in a fur coat tried to hide an elegantly-dressed child, who was vomiting copiously and shamelessly. Miss Thompson saw a seat, fifty yards away. She walked towards it with determination, and sat down between two men, one smoking a cheroot.

Just in time. It was a giddy-fit, the first since she had been allowed to get up at Arras Farm. A grave disappointment—she had hoped that the giddy-fits would not return at all. Perhaps Doctor Crewe had been right—she should have stayed at the Farm a bit longer. But it was no good paying attention to doctors, she had proved that again and again. A medically-advised tortoise would never reach the winning-post at all. There was a kindly conspiracy to prevent her getting back, she could see that. They were dear people, Mrs. Benson and all of them. But she was going back—soon.

The fit took longer than the usual time ("perhaps because it's the first for so long") and she still felt unsteady when she got up. Which was the way out of the station? People seemed to be going in every direction. She saw a man in some uniform, standing idle, and started to go towards him. When she

was a few feet away he turned and walked off. She dared not try to run after him, and it was useless to call out in the midst of all this din. A man overtaking her was accosted by a cab-driver. "Taxi, sir?" He walked on without even looking at the driver, and stepped into a private car. The driver, not hopefully, asked: "Taxi, Madam?"

"No, I don't think so, I have to go some way. I think I must go by the Underground."

"Where is it, lady?"

She turned the piece of paper in her fingers—it was easier now that the ticket was gone. He took it from her and scrutinized it.

"Kennington," he said.

"Yes. Can you tell me how——?"

"I'll take you."

He took hold of the bag and rug.

"But what will your fare be?"

He thought for a moment, looking at her.

"One shilling, including gratooty."

"And how much would it be by Underground?"

"Dunno!" Then "'bout two shillings."

Miss Thompson was incredulous. She remembered being warned—how many years ago?—about men at London termini. "But it's twenty years since even Lalominchu invited me to be one of his wives," she thought. And certainly a taxicab would be much better. If another fit came on in the underground train she might be carried past her destination.

She followed the driver.

The taxi darted out of the station, squeezed into the stream of traffic, pulled out and darted back into the stream in front of a limousine, slid up to

the left of a dray, hooted sharply to attract the policeman, pulled out to the right again, swung round, dodged another taxi, overtook a bus, and raced down the Vauxhall Bridge Road. Miss Thompson shut her eyes. Presently they stopped. She opened her eyes and seized the umbrella; but there were no houses, only a parapet and the Thames, and a bus in front and another taxi on the right. She closed her eyes again. They waited without moving for several minutes, then she felt a jerk and a swerve. When she opened her eyes again for a moment she saw a motor van coming straight towards her, five yards away, and not checking its speed. With her hand in front of her face she waited for the shock, but no shock came. She looked again, and turning round saw the tail of the van. Her own driver was sitting bolt upright and apparently unmoved. The speed of the taxi was increasing. It was rushing towards a narrow space between two buses, one coming in the opposite direction. This time, with an effort, she kept her eyes open, and saw the sides of the two buses move by, neither touching. A few minutes later she caught sight of the name Ennersley Gardens; the taxi lurched round to the left and after a few yards stopped. The driver climbed out and opened the door.

"That was a wonderful escape we had from that van," Miss Thompson said.

"Escape?"

He put out his arm and noticed how heavily she leant on it.

"All right, m'm, I'll bring your things along."

At the top of the five stone step she stood, with

the baggage piled at her feet, and opened her purse. He watched her fumbling among the coppers.

"I'll just go back and see you haven't left anything," he said.

A moment later she saw him drive off. She was too astonished even to call after him. Then: "I know, he's stolen my umbrella," she thought. But the umbrella was there, underneath the rug.

The entrance to Number 17 was furnished with a pull-bell, no knocker. Miss Thompson pulled twice, but heard no sound. She rapped with her knuckles, but though she could hear someone moving in the house no one came. She began to fear that she would feel giddy again; her ears were still full of noise, the jolting of the taxi had shaken her, and her head was swimming a little. She could spread out the rug and sit on the top step, but that would look foolish. Making a last effort she tugged hard at the bell-knob. Something snapped inside, and she found the knob loose in her hand, with a foot of wire attached. Feeling a strange inclination to cry, she spread the rug and sat down.

The door opened a few seconds later.

"Good afternoon," said Miss Thompson, rising as quickly as she could. "I'm so sorry, I'm afraid I've broken the bell."

"Bell? Oh, never mind, Tom'll put that right, give him something to do. I'm afraid I kept you waiting. I thought I heard something, but you know how it is, sometimes you hear things and it's next door, and sometimes you don't hear anything and somebody's knocking all the time. Sometimes I say: 'Shall I go down?' and then I think: 'Oh, it's only my imagination.' Well, come in Miss

Thompson, how are you? I'm very glad you've come, I hope you'll be comfortable; I don't think I've had you before, have I?"

Mrs. Fuller specialized in missionary ladies, for pious and for social reasons. She had an arrangement with the Edith Warrener Women's Missionary Society, whereby she gained a smaller but more regular turnover than others in the business; it was, she said and believed, a sacrifice on her part; "We must all do our bit," she told herself and her neighbours and her lodgers. Since the first year of her widowhood—twelve years before—she had made cheerfulness the keynote of her demeanour, but she contrived, with the skill proper to her sex, to show plainly that the cheerfulness sprang from piety rather than inward gladness. She had said once in a romantic moment: "I keep a bright face to cover a broken heart." And indeed her heart was broken; not, as she thought, by the death of her husband (a decent little man, who had always been content with poor jobs in the belief that his racing luck would turn), but by the weariness and boredom and humiliation of back-street existence.

"Come along in! One more step, six altogether we have, I'll take the bag."

Except when something pungent was being cooked in the kitchen the house smelt of carbolic; occasionally the smell of floor-polish was uppermost—Mrs. Fuller laboured devotedly on the oilcloth—but it was a cake of Lifebuoy that in many parts of the world brought memories of Mrs. Fuller to the ladies of the Mission. Carbolic coloured the life of Number 17. The stairs, each ten inches up and seven along, faced the front door. At the top

of the stairs, you turned right and faced a wall; on the left, up one step, was a short passage leading into semi-darkness; on the right, three steps up, another passage with two doors on the left and another at the end; the door at the end faced another flight of stairs; the same arrangement was repeated on the next landing.

"*That* comes from China," said Mrs. Fuller, triumphantly. It was the tooth of some mammal, cut to hold a barometer, which registered "Fair." "Mrs. Tamey gave me that, and a book of Chinese post-cards that I've got downstairs. I'll show it you later on. I daresay you'll recognize some of the places. It's just one more lot of stairs up; I had to put you on the top floor next to me, because Miss Elverton has a heart and doesn't like stairs. . . . This is yours; I think you'll find everything. I'll send Tom up with some hot water; the middle drawer does stick a bit, it's the damp, you want to pull both handles at once. When would you like your tea? Five o'clock is our usual time."

"Five o'clock would do nicely, thank you. Don't bother about hot water. Oh, yes, I'm sure the bed will be all right, thank you very much."

Departing, Mrs. Fuller shut the door behind her by slamming it sharply. There was a trick in doing this which only she knew; even Tom could not make it shut.

Miss Thompson, having taken off her hat and coat, sat down on the only chair to rest. The room was very cold, a draught flowing between door and window. She got up and unpacked her things. (This was a task she hated. There seemed to be a relative finality about it—it indicated that she

was settling down. A stupid feeling, she knew; but she would never release the catch of her bag without thinking: "If only I were doing this in Gahuga!") Her hands were colder when she had finished putting the things away in the drawers, and she was shivering a little. "I wonder if I shall be in the way if I go downstairs?" she thought. "I suppose there's a general sitting-room." She wanted to be warm, but she wanted to be alone until she felt better. At length she decided on warmth, but she found, trying the door, that it had stuck. She tried several times, but failed to move it. It would not do to use her strength too much; she supposed that someone would come up before long.

To pass the time she took out a writing-pad and a pencil, and started to write a letter, sitting with the rug round her shoulders and the bed-quilt over her knees.

"Here I am in London. Mrs. Fuller is a good deal older than Mrs. Kest, with whom I stayed last time, but she is very kind, and I am sure means to make me comfortable. It is hard work for her, poor thing, she has only her son to help, who I fancy from what she says, is not quite right in the head, and there are four other lodgers and the house is full of stairs. I can't understand how she manages. I have not met any of the others yet. One of them is Miss Saule, from the Transvaal, of whom I have heard a great deal from Miss Green.

"At present I still do not see my way to getting to Wakefield. I have to spend a good deal of money in replenishing my clothing—Kennington, from what I have seen of it does not seem to be a *fashionable* part of London, but its standards no

doubt are higher than those of São Maharo! But you know, dear, that if I can possibly manage it I shall pay you a visit before I sail. I don't know yet when that will be. Perhaps you will hear of someone who is travelling from London to Wakefield and would take me as a passenger for less than the railway-fare. I prefer travelling by train, I am an old-fashioned woman, I'm afraid, but I would not let nervousness stand in the way of the joy of seeing you.

"This house is in quite a quiet street, a relief after the part of London round Victoria Station. It will take some time before my head is used to London again."

She stopped writing to look out at the street; she had hardly seen it before. Right opposite her window was another which belonged to the corresponding room of a house built in the same style. The other houses, extending both ways without a break to the ends of the street, were exact replicas. The roofs were rather low, and behind them other roofs rose more steeply. Higher still, a spider's web of wires broke the grey sky. A pale sun stood a few feet above one of the chimneys, away to the left. "That would be between south and west," Miss Thompson thought. It was only guesswork, but she fancied that the square chimney with the cowl marked the direction in which her will was straining. She could not think of days and nights on a steamer, but only of a huge map with the earth and the water real. Much more clearly she could see a bank of trees and the hills rising behind. Her eyes fixed on the chimney, she leant out of the window until the knob on the blind-cord pressed painfully into her breast.

PART III

FIRST STAGE

THE brown dish-cover had not yet been lifted, but they knew it was dried haddock.

Still, it would be boiled eggs to-morrow—haddock had not yet been so impertinent as to appear on a Sunday—and there was a good chance that they would not be underboiled, as a very tactful remark had been made last Sunday about under-boiling; they might be hard-boiled, but you could always put in a little piece of butter if Mrs. Fuller's attention was engaged. To-morrow was also the day for a clean cloth and clean napkins; it would be the blue check, the two yellow check having run their course. The blue check was brighter and jollier than the yellow ones. The present cloth had reached a very dingy stage (Mrs. Fuller saw no point in removing it between meals; there was a little desk for the ladies to do their writing, and sewing could be done on the sofa). Miss Elverton had made it worse, but it was really Miss Brittain's fault, as Miss Brittain had addressed her rather suddenly, causing her to drop the hand in which she was holding a cup of coffee. Miss Brittain had insisted on applying her own remedy—milk. "If you put milk on at once," she said, "it will dry leaving no stain at all. I learnt that dodge from a Bengali boy, it's wonderful the things they know." Mrs. Fuller had been too modest to oppose her

experience to Bengali wisdom, but as language and memory were Miss Brittain's two principal failings, a brown stain, reaching half way across the table, had disfigured the cloth for the rest of the week. The porridge was hot this morning. There had not been quite enough, but Mrs. Fuller had gone without it. "I always pay for my own mistakes," she insisted, with her smile. "No, Miss Saule, you have too little as it is." Miss Saule was disappointed; she liked porridge, but she had meant to say something about the nice kinds of fish you could get, suitable alternatives to haddock; it would be ungracious now. "I shall get some flowers for the table," she thought, "and then say something at lunch-time." But she remembered afterwards that Mrs. Fuller did not really like flowers on the table. She was a methodical woman, as she had need to be, and she was accustomed to having the big cruet in the centre. Flowers could hardly be put anywhere but in the middle of the table. That would mean moving the cruet. If it was moved towards Mrs. Fuller's end the water jug would have to go nearer to Miss Elverton, and Miss Elverton would knock it over when she passed the bread to Miss Saule, as she always did at the beginning of a meal. If, on the other hand, the cruet was moved towards Miss Brittain, the vegetable dishes would have to be shifted in the same direction; this would mean putting the bread-dish on the piano, and there would be crumbs all over the sofa. Knowing all this from long experience, Mrs. Fuller always said: "I think they would look nicest in the tall vase on the mantelpiece," when one of the ladies brought flowers. Both she and Miss Saule knew, however,

that with Miss Elverton in the house flowers could not be put on the mantelpiece. "Would she be a little bit grieved if I cleaned all the silver?" Miss Saule wondered next. That might form a suitable prelude to a remark on the question of haddock. But Mrs. Fuller might be offended, though she would only say so in a roundabout way. The trouble was that the silver obviously needed cleaning. The same thing applied to the knives. Miss Saule looked, with a side glance, at her own knives, both big ones, one for fish and one for bread and butter. What Mrs. Fuller really needed was a new set—the blades of these were concave, and few of them fitted tightly. But that was altogether outside the scope of Miss Saule's purse.

There was a slight fog outside. The smell in the room proclaimed that the oilcloth had already been done.

"May I give you some haddock, Miss Saule?"

"Thank you, yes, please."

"Miss Elverton?"

"What? Oh, yes, please."

"Would you mind passing the pepper?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"More coffee, Miss Thompson?"

"Yes, I will have a little, please, half a cup."

"It's foggy again."

"Yes, isn't it?"

Miss Thompson watched the plates. She was hoping to get the one with the three chips in the edge. That one, she knew, was all right. There was one with a crack right across, and a little tributary crack forming a narrow segment. It was bound to break before long. Mrs. Fuller's for aula for break-

ages was: "Never mind, accidents will happen. The trouble is—" (with the smile) "—it's difficult to replace this set." The set, willow-pattern, was three large plates, four small, two cheese; one meat-dish, two vegetable-dishes (one with white cover), one gravy-bowl cover. It was brought up to strength by white pieces, white-with-gold-rim pieces, and white-with-blue-rim pieces. It had been passed down from one generation to another of Mrs. Fuller's ladies that the proper price for a willow-pattern plate, to include pain-and-suffering, was two shillings. The breaker could supply a replacement for any white plate, but the tradition was that a willow-pattern plate could not be replaced.

"I expect you had it warmer as a rule in China?" said Mrs. Fuller, passing Miss Thompson the cracked plate. "More coffee, Miss Elverton?"

"What? Oh, yes, please."

"Would you mind passing the marmalade, Miss Brittain?"

"May I have the butter, please?"

"Did I give you enough milk, Miss Brittain?"

"I had such a funny dream last night, but I can't remember what it was now."

"Yes, thank you, plenty of sugar."

The fog was lifting.

"I believe I can see the sun," said Miss Saule.

"What?" said Miss Elverton. "Oh, the sun, yes."

"Yes, there it is."

"So it is!"

The five ladies looked out of the window, and the sun was, indeed, beginning to pierce the fog. And to-morrow was Sunday, with breakfast half an hour later and a clean tablecloth.

"I believe it's going to be a lovely day," said Miss Saule.

"I think you're right," said Mrs. Fuller. She herself would not see much of the loveliness, as she had set her mind on doing the back room. The sun would reach Miss Elverton, as she lay on the sofa in her bedroom. Miss Saule would take her little walk, down to the end, along Buckingham Street, and back by Russell Road, probably with Miss Britain.

"You must all of you get out for a bit," said Mrs. Fuller maternally.

But even as she spoke Miss Elverton, white-faced and holding her handkerchief to her mouth, jumped up and left the room. She would not be seen again for the rest of the day. Miss Britain went to attend to her.

To Miss Thompson the triumph of the sun was an omen. She had woken, that morning, without a headache, and had realized as she dressed that she felt better; the feeling was something much more definite than just thinking that she felt better, the experience of previous mornings. The pain all down one side, the new pain which London had produced, was as bad as ever; but that did not matter, now that she felt her blood running faster. "I'm ten years younger, this morning," she thought. She went down to breakfast without touching the wall or the banisters. When she had finished her haddock the plate was unbroken, though the segment had actually wobbled. Now the sun was coming through and to-morrow was Sunday.

Poor Miss Elverton! It must be something else besides heart. This was the second morning running

that she had gone out in the middle of breakfast. Perhaps she would be taken Home to rest soon. A wonderful old lady. Miss Saule said that she had penetrated farther into Tibet than any other white woman—Miss Saule knew all about everybody. "They made her an F.R.G.S.," Miss Saule said. But Miss Thompson could not think for long about Miss Elverton. She was six years younger—sixteen, including the ten she had gone back this morning. Miss Elverton belonged to a past generation, a figure to be honoured. Miss Thompson's thoughts were in the future. For the last fortnight she had been at work on a new system of writing to represent the Tulasu speech. The old system was unsatisfactory, as she had found when trying to translate the Gospels, and she had long hoped for an opportunity to invent a new one. It would mean covering much old ground again, when she got back, but it would be worth while. If she were forced to prolong this furlough she would make a start with the new translations, so that they should be ready; but it was slow work—her eyes had become weaker lately and she could only use them for three hours a day. She wanted to work on road-plans, too, prospecting for the far future. But please God there would be no time for that.

This morning was the opportunity she had waited for through many wet days. She had not taken anyone into her confidence, but she had asked Miss Saule casually if there was a travel agency in the neighbourhood. Miss Saule had said: "Why?" and she had replied, laughing: "I'm thinking of going to the Winter Sports." Then Miss Saule had told her that there was a Pickford office not far away,

and explained how to get there. It would mean crossing two main roads, but she felt up to that this morning. "No one else gets run over, so why should I?" she thought.

Her first objective was to get a list of South African sailings. She found it delicious to fancy herself sitting in the office, which would be full of pictures of palms and blue lagoons, asking for full particulars of the various routes, and talking as if she were thinking of booking a passage at once. She would almost feel that she really was about to start. It would bring her nearer the event, anyway. She would be able to pin the list up in her bedroom and mark one of the dates, fairly far ahead. Then, when she felt better, she would mark a nearer date. It was a practical move. Miss Thompson liked being practical.

She had a further plan, more ambitious and not yet so clearly formed. The rule of the Society was that no one should sail before being passed as fit by the doctor. She had applied for examination a fortnight ago, confident of her ability to cajole the kindly old gentleman, as she had done several times on past furloughs; but she had failed. "You must wait a bit longer," he had said firmly, and would not be moved. It was quite ridiculous the way her work was being hampered by the whims of obstinate men. First Captain Jorney, then Doctor Crewe (she had beaten him), and now the mission doctor. She would get the better of them all somehow—she felt like it this morning. It was very unpleasant to break the Society's rules, and poor Miss Green would be upset, but she could hardly refuse to refund the passage-money. The great

difficulty was to find someone who would lend the money. So far the only plan she could think of was to stop a rich-looking man in the street and say: "Excuse me, will you be good enough to lend me a hundred pounds—or eighty would do?" He might be so surprised that he would give it to her. But there were not many rich-looking men in the neighbourhood of Ennersley Gardens; and if she was unlucky she might find herself in a lunatic asylum. "Still, I'm sure there's some way," she thought.

"Some more bread, Miss Thompson?"

"No, thank you."

"Miss Saule, won't you have any more?"

"No, I've finished, thank you."

Mrs. Fuller closed her eyes and dropped her chin on to her heart-shaped brooch.

"For what we are about to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful." Mrs. Fuller always used the same grace for both ends of the meal.

Almost immediately they heard the sound of letters dropping into the passage. This sequence of events was so common that only ladies who were new to Number 17 smiled quietly. (Breakfast had been at seven-thirty in Mr. Fuller's lifetime, and Mrs. Fuller, having planned her domestic routine on that basis, would see no reason for altering it.)

"Bills!" said Mrs. Fuller.

It was her standard witticism. On this occasion one of two letters was the gas-bill. The other was addressed to Miss Thompson in Miss Green's hand. It was the first letter she had received for many days, and she opened it in some excitement.

"I do hope you are feeling much better now,"

it ran. "I have been meaning to come round and see you all, but I seem to get no time at all. I should be so delighted if you could come and see me and have a few minutes' chat when the weather is better and you feel strong enough. In case you are not certain, you change at Charing Cross and get on an eastbound train, getting off at Monument. I expect you will remember the way from there. Don't bother to let me know, if by any chance I am not in Miss Gibbs is sure to be, and she is looking forward to seeing you again as much as I am."

Miss Thompson passed the letter to Miss Saule. "I shall go this morning," she thought. "I might be able to arrange for another medical examination. Fair means before foul. Of course, these examinations cost the Society money, but I'm sure if I could be seen just now, when I am feeling so well, I should be passed."

"I think I'll go this morning," she said. "We may not have such a nice day again. Would you be a dear and come with me to the Underground station?"

Miss Saule was delighted. It was rather far for her to walk, with her rheumatism—it would mean lying down and suffering some agony for the rest of the morning—but she liked a job of this sort. Miss Saule was London-born, and she enjoyed playing the part of woman-of-the-world.

"We could take a bus the last part of the way," she said, "but I don't know if it's worth while. It saves less than half a mile and you have to pay a penny just the same."

"Yes, I think it would be better to walk," Miss

Thompson agreed. She had an idea that no bus ever stopped to pick up or put down a passenger. "You're sure it won't be too far for you?"

"Of course not. On my last furlough I walked from the Tower Bridge to Ludgate Circus one day."

They renewed this topic half an hour later, when they started, and maintained it at intervals all the way to the station.

"You're sure you're not finding it too much?"

"No, are you?"

"You wouldn't like to get on a bus for the last bit?"

"No, I'm quite all right, thank you."

"Now I'm sure you've come far enough."

Each regarded the other as an invalid, herself as an athlete a little out of training. Gallantly, they arrived at the station together.

"No, you never get returns on the Tube," said Miss Saule. "Now let me get your ticket for you."

"Oh, I can manage, thank you. Travelling's easy when you haven't a case to worry about."

She took her place in the queue, while Miss Saule mounted guard beside her.

"I want to go to Monument Station, please. How much is it, please?"

Without answering, the clerk took the shilling she held out. A ticket fell on to the shelf, and coppers shot out from somewhere. A man behind her said: "Belsize!" and threw down a shilling. Another ticket fell. Miss Thompson, dazed, took the wrong ticket and the shilling. Before Miss Saule could intervene more coppers had appeared.

"The great thing is not to get rattled," Miss

Saule said kindly, when she had sorted matters out. "Now I'm sure you'll be all right. You know where you change?"

"Yes. I'm sure I'll be all right. Thank you so much for coming. Good-bye!"

"Tickets, please!" said the man at the lift.

Miss Thompson gave him her ticket.

"Here, you'll want this!" he said, giving the ticket back.

"Oh, of course, I'm sorry! Thank you!"

"Good-bye!" said Miss Saule, as the gates rattled across.

She waited till the doors had closed, then looked for somewhere to sit down. She would have to rest for a quarter of an hour before starting the walk back. "Poor Miss Thompson!" she thought. "Such a dear creature, but such a country bumpkin. I hope she'll be all right."

Miss Thompson, sitting in the train, was thinking: "It was wrong of me to ask her to come so far. She's so very lame, poor thing. I hope she'll be all right."

"Is this all right for Charing Cross?" she asked.

Arriving at Monument she felt elated. The stuffiness and motion had given her a headache and made her feel rather sick, but she was proud of having managed the change successfully. "Miss Saule herself could not have been more skilful on the escalator," she thought. The sense of triumph lasted till the lift brought her to the surface and the noise of a dozen Kenningtons suddenly assaulted her ears. Then she was frightened.

To avoid being pushed on to the pavement she stepped behind a newsboy and stood there, panting.

She was not quite sure of the way. She remembered having turned to the right, the last time, but she could recognize nothing in this street. Had she come out of the station a different way? Of course, the buildings would have changed a great deal in eight years. It wouldn't do to go wrong, because her legs were already showing signs of going on strike. She would have to ask.

But she waited a little. Standing up was almost as tiring as walking, but she was afraid to ask at once. Directly she had been told which way to go she would have to say "Thank you," and start. You couldn't say "Oh, I see!" and stay where you were. It was safe just here, and cool and pleasant after the filthy air of the Tube. Directly she moved she would be jostled again—she might get pushed into the road, where the buses were sweeping past like express trains. Stupid to be so frightened! But surely the buses had not been so big, last time; and surely the noise was worse. "Why, I never minded the traffic in Wakefield," she thought, "and the pavements used to be terribly crowded on Saturday nights." But London had always been different, and it seemed to have grown higher and more overwhelming this time. Still, there was no excuse, and she couldn't wait there all day.

"Excuse me!" she said to the newsboy. "Can you tell me my way to Frolick Street?"

A woman passing turned and said: "Frolick Street? I'm just going there. Shall I show you?"

"Oh, thank you so much!"

The woman walked very fast, dodging other walkers with swift competence. Several times Miss Thompson thought she had lost her. "Such a

crowd on the pavement always, just at this time," the woman said, half over her shoulder. "Cross here!" and she darted in front of an accelerating taxi.

She stood waiting on a refuge, while Miss Thompson, separated by a long stream of moving traffic, gazed at her hopelessly. A break came, and her guide looked at her, smiling encouragement. Several men and girls darted across, but Miss Thompson dared not follow them. Another break, and she scuttled across, holding her skirt, and arrived panting on the refuge. The guide, hardly waiting until her protégée had joined her, seized the opportunity given by a break in the other stream and reached the pavement. Miss Thompson was left on the refuge. . . .

"I always say," the woman remarked cheerfully, turning sharply to the left and still half a pace ahead, "that's it's better to cut through by yourself when you have a chance. People are always getting killed by hanging on to each other. What? Oh, you know your way from here? Well, I go straight on, so I'll say good-bye. Oh, not at all!"

Frolick Street, a quarter of a mile in length, was only twelve feet wide. The narrow pavements left just enough room for one van to pass. There were four warehouse entrances, three on one side and one on the other, so that the street was nearly always blocked; and it was filled all day with the noise of wheels grinding the kerbs, of the stamp of horses being cruelly forced backwards, of heavy engines rumbling in reverse gear. The smell was of malt and sawdust and petrol exhaust and horse-

dung, the last being strongest. The street was beloved by older Londoners, as it had nearly everything which the City meant to them. Paradoxically Miss Thompson, who hated London, felt that Frolick Street was the only place in that vast area of tumult and hardness which had anything homely or lovable about it.

Miss Thompson stopped at the corner and hesitated. Her goal was not more than sixty yards away, but she was not sure if she could manage the distance without a rest. "No," she thought, "I can't stay here leaning against a wall." She walked on down the pavement, very slowly, panting, reached the door at last, and went down the long passage. There were doors with various names on each side. A door at the end, labelled: "Brazil and Universal Hosiery, Ltd.," was open. At a small desk inside a huge woman was furiously typewriting. On the other side of the passage was a flight of stairs.

Miss Thompson turned first towards the stairs, started to go up, but found that her strength was exhausted. She sat down on the bottom stair. "If Miss Green or Miss Gibbs sees me I don't know what I shall say," she thought. "It was kind of that lady to show me the way, but I wish she hadn't walked so fast." The fat woman finished a line, banged the carriage across, and glanced up. She drummed out another half line, then stopped, looked up again, and smiled through her red lips.

"You are fatigued?" She spoke with a strong foreign accent.

"Yes, I've walked very fast."

"I have a seat here. It will be more comfortable."

Miss Thompson accepted gratefully.

The fat woman finished the line.

"You are a missionary?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Ah, yes, I knew!"

"You guessed?"

"I knew. I know the missionaries always, they look so tired."

"Not always, I hope."

"Always. And Miss Green. And Miss Gibbs. Always tired."

"London's a tiring place." She had not yet recovered her breath, and felt incapable of conversation.

"London? Oh yes! And across the water, that is tiring, no?"

"Sometimes."

"But you do a great work. You work hard for the British Empire."

"Well, I wouldn't say that that's our main object——"

"Ah, but no! It is not the object. It is only the result. You make the foreign people docile. Then the business man comes, and when they will bear the business man no longer the soldiers come."

Miss Thompson rose.

"I think I'm quite rested now——"

"Ah, the chair is not comfortable?"

"Oh, yes, it is, but——"

"You do not like what I say about the British Empire? No?"

"Well——"

"Never mind. It is a great thing, this British Empire. It gives work to me, and my countrymen,

and all the Jews. It is a pity you are so kind to the Jews. Still, we cannot keep the British Empire to ourselves. We must let everybody have some, even the English."

She laughed, a high, penetrating chuckle. Miss Thompson thought she must be insane. She got up again, with more determination.

"Thank you so much for letting me sit here."

"I have given myself a pleasure." The foreign woman had suddenly become demure. "It is a very nice day."

"Yes, lovely. Thank you so much!"

Stopping for breath every few steps, Miss Thompson made her way up to the second floor. There were only two doors on this landing. She knocked at the one on the left.

"Come in! . . . No, you cut me off . . . hullo . . . yes, Miss Green here . . . (do sit down) . . . what . . . he can't? Oh, yes, I quite understand . . . oh, I shall have to find someone . . . no, I can't think who, but I shall manage it somehow . . . good-bye!"

Miss Green put down the receiver, took off her spectacles, and pushed a pile of books along her desk, knocking a heap of papers on to the floor. Simultaneously she pushed back her chair—it was of the office pattern but without castors and it always pushed up the hearthrug—and came round to the front of the desk.

"At last!" She took Miss Thompson's hand, hesitated for a moment, trying to remember, and then impulsively kissed her. "Sit you down. It's splendid to see you again. Are you feeling better? You look tired, but not so bad."

She lifted a pile of collecting-boxes off the visitor's chair and flicked it with her handkerchief.

"Gibby's out, so I shall have you all to myself. I've got twenty-three letters to type, but I'm not going to touch one of them for half an hour." (Within: "That will mean staying till nine again to-night, but I'll go out and get a cup of tea and a poached egg, so there'll be practically nothing to do when I get home.") "Gibby and I were trying to remember yesterday how long it was since we saw you.—Well, he was quite right, whoever he was.—No, you mustn't think about that, we all have our limits. Yes, Mrs. Benson's a dear, isn't she?—Now I'm just going to get this kettle filled and put it on the gas ring. Yes, it's our latest luxury."

She picked up the papers which had fallen. Her eyes caught the top one, she scrutinized it for an instant, then marked it with a rubber-stamp and added her initials. Turning three quarters of a circle she picked up the kettle with her left hand.

"But really you shouldn't bother!" Miss Thompson said.

She was longing for a cup of tea, neverthele- .

"No bother! It's just half way up the stairs.

The chair seemed to be more comfortable than the one provided by the Brazil and Universal Hosiery Company. Miss Thompson sat very still, relishing the comfort, feeling her breath come more steadily, letting her eye wander round the room. At times, lying in her hot room in the Gahuga Mission House and listening to the buzz of a million insects, she had fancied that she could hear the rumble of traffic as she heard it now, and had tried to picture this room. She could always recall its

presence, though the details had evaded her. Now each one seemed to reprove her by its absurd familiarity. Of course it was the clock that came between the safe and the bookshelves. Her eyes were not good enough to read the titles of the books, but she knew some of them from the size and colour. Their positions had not been altered. The Psalms of David, The Life of Livingstone, she had forgotten what the big black one was, the next was Teller's Commentary, and the green ones were Chambers' Encyclopædia. The small ones on the top shelf were all Pitman books, Card-Indexing, Office Management, How to Conduct a Meeting. Yes, the crack on the ceiling ran from the left corner, above the door into Miss Gibbs' room, over to the fireplace. She remembered wondering whether it had gone in the other direction. The wallpaper, where it was visible, was the same, a little more faded, perhaps. The same slightly fusty smell in the room. And it looked very like the same cob-web bridge, stretching from the picture-rail down to the frame of Edith Warrener's portrait; perhaps the same spider made it every morning, or perhaps a descendant kept up the Tradition of his House. Curious, the way it all remained like this, always the same. Of course, there was no reason why it shouldn't; but when you went so far and stayed away for such a long time. At this moment the Mission House would be standing, just as it did when she was there. Unless the Yellow Wind had come again and taken its toll; or unless a hunter from the outer woods had come north and had felt in the mood for a fine bonfire—That might have happened. In that case, what would Elsa—? But

Elsa, of course, would have gone home. The house would be empty. The dust, by this time, must be thick on everything. Perhaps Elsa would have covered up the bookshelf and put the surgery things away in the cupboard before she went. But to think of Elsa—and Peter and scores of others—gave her physical pain, somewhere between the throat and the stomach. Her mind would not leave the Mission House, so in defence she turned it to remembering every detail in the welcome-room. And to her wonder these details had become shadowy, they would neither take definite shape nor fit together. Yet when she got back, yes, when she got back——

“I’m so sorry, I met Miss Hudson, she was filling a kettle too, she belongs to the James Persia Tobacco upstairs, and she kept me talking. She’s a terrible talker, but very nice.”

“I’ve been feasting on this dear old room,” Miss Thompson said.

“Office, please!” She frowned comically. “You mustn’t call this Hub of Industry a room!”

Like so many of Miss Green’s little jokes, the Hub of Industry had served her well for many years. She still chuckled when she used the phrase, and still failed to realize how exact the description was. She was connected by threads—ever so many letters, ever so many parcels, ever so many notes and cheques, ever so many thoughts—with fifty towns and villages and lonely stations in three out of five continents; her typewriter rattled, sometimes for hours without ceasing; the papers piled up in the many baskets, the piles grew lower and higher again; the room in the cellars was nearly full of

boxes of files—something would have to be done about it soon. Miss Green could not see the threads, because she could not see the places they led to. She had never been out of England—seldom out of Greater London—and she had no visual imagination. The photographs of foreign places were unreal to her, like the pictures in a fairy-tale book. She knew that she worked, but that was not industry; it was just answering letters, filing, making arrangements, staying late if necessary. “I never have time to really do anything,” she said, “I’m always just attending to odd things.” Even the task of appealing—by her own efforts she had raised some thirty thousand pounds since joining the Society—seemed to her a very second-hand kind of labour.

But she had her professional pride. She was a business woman—a pioneer in that status. Sometimes, when the work got behindhand, she would repair a careless omission in routine by going back and putting the Date Received stamp on a drawerful of letters, worrying herself to remember the dates, and painfully turning the figures on the instrument. She had not looked at the business-method books for many years, but she thought she had “system” at her finger-tips. She had no idea how to arrange her work, which was three times more than she and her assistant could properly manage, but she always got through it. She was a small, beak-nosed, grey-haired lady, as successful a muddler as any business man in the City.

Miss Thompson said: “I met a queer lady downstairs.”

“Oh, how?”

Miss Thompson hesitated. She dared not confess

that she had been forced to take a rest when she was trying to show herself off as being in the best of health.

"The door was open—some hosiery company, I think. She spoke to me."

"Oh, Miss Rivalez! South American. Don't have anything to do with her. Dreadful person!"

"She seemed very friendly. But she talked in a queer way."

"Dreadful woman!" For a moment Miss Green was quite angry—she detested a cuckoo in what she considered her nest. "She's one of those Communists. They say she's of Portuguese extraction. I don't know why the Government lets such people in. I don't like having foreigners in the building."

"Oh, I don't think she can be Portuguese." Miss Thompson had brightened—it was seldom that she could be the woman-of-the-world. "I know hundreds of Portuguese. At least, I used to know several. There are hardly any now, I think the mines have given out, and they used to get ill a lot——"

"Well, she's a foreigner, anyway. I don't trust them."

Miss Green glared through her spectacles. Frolick Street, her part of the Empire, was going to be the last to surrender. But she smiled almost at once.

"Have I put enough sugar in?"

"Oh, yes, thank you."

"Will you excuse me just one minute, I've got something on my mind. I just want to see if I can find a letter——"

She began to rummage in one of the lower drawers. Miss Thompson turned her head to look out of the

window. In a room on the other side of the street, only a few feet away, three girls were working industriously at sewing-machines. Through another window, lower down, she could see two more girls, typing. Down on the pavement, which had become less crowded, a man in a baize apron was talking to another in a top hat, probably a messenger. Miss Thompson's eye caught, for the first time as far as she could remember, an elaborately carved lintel over the door by which the men were standing. She wondered why the builder had troubled to put such an ornament where it could hardly ever be seen. The old pride in craftsmanship, perhaps. The ornament was the bust of a woman, holding above her head an anvil, carved in bas-relief.

"No good!" said Miss Green. "I shall have to go through all the baskets again later on. It's Mrs. Hammett. I can't remember whether she's in London or Sheffield. And if she's in London I don't know what her address is, so it's not much good anyway. Never mind!"

"I wish I could help you."

"Oh, it's all right, thank you very much. I shall have to wire to the school and tell them the lecture's off. It can't be helped."

"School?"

"Huntersfield. Oh, of course, you don't know. How could you? I was thinking I'd told you, my mind's so full of it all. You know Huntersfield College? It's the big girls' school near Bristol. It's a good missionary school, they have wonderful traditions. Mr. Leveridge was going to give a lecture there for us to-night."

"Mr. Leveridge?"

"Yes. Oh, you don't know him? He's the Wesleyan minister at Crouch End. He was a missionary himself till recently, in the Orange Free State, and he's a very good friend of ours. He's given several lectures for us. He's a wonderful lecturer."

"And now he can't go?"

"No. His wife rang up just before you came. He's got 'flu', poor man. His daughter is bringing the slides here, and his descriptive notes, and I was hoping I could get someone to go down instead and show the slides and make the notes into a lecture. But I simply can't lay my hand on anyone. Nearly all the furloughs are on the sick-list. It's most unlucky. Miss Saule, for instance, she would have done it splendidly, and she likes an adventure of that sort, but she won't be feeling anything like that for some time yet."

"It is a pity."

"Yes, it's such a good missionary school. Apart from the money side, you never know what good may spring up from sowing the seed in fertile soil like that."

"The seed, yes!" But inside Miss Thompson was saying: "Adventure!" It was odd the way that word still had its effect, still quickened her blood, still took her back to that crowded and stuffy evening in the Woolcombers' Hall at Wakefield. "A ridiculous old woman who's frightened of crossing a street," she jeered at herself. She said: "Well, I'm not on the sick-list any longer. Of course I don't know anything about the Orange Free State——"

§

"You know, I don't really like to let you. Are you really quite sure?"

"Perfectly."

Miss Thompson had just been through a giddy-fit, but she hoped that Miss Green, who had talked steadily all through it, had noticed nothing wrong. They were sitting opposite each other in a Lyons basement, the upper floor being full.

"Of course I would go myself," Miss Green said, "but I don't see how I could possibly leave Miss Gibbs to do everything. There's an enormous bill from Surgical Supplies which has to be checked, besides the correspondence. These bills always take us——"

"But it's quite all right, really. I'm no lecturer, but I can show them the slides. I know I shall feel all right."

At the moment she was not feeling all right. The effects of the giddy-fit were lasting a long time, as they had begun to do lately; but that meant that with luck she would be in smooth water until after the lecture was over—half past twelve, the lecture was at eight, over by nine, say, that was eight, no, eight and a half hours. Oh, yes, there was every chance. "And it's partly the stuffiness that's upsetting me," she thought. Miss Green did not seem to notice it; these wonderful Cockneys, nothing seemed to upset them, they throve on fog. Her own constitution, of course, had been trained to withstand a different sort of attack. "I shall be all right the moment I see Harbour Town. Illness there is something natural. Fever makes

you perspire cleanly. Here the closeness of everything seems to press in on you and drive the perspiration inwards."

"It's rather warm here, isn't it?" she said.

"It is a bit. Waitress!"

Tobacco smoke curled in the upper air, where the cloud made by a newly-lit cigar was pushing the other clouds aside. Below, the smells of a dozen foods fought for supremacy. Miss Thompson was thirsty, but her coffee was still too hot to drink. She fixed her eyes on four men playing dominoes at a table in the corner, till their heads seemed to bulge and come nearer her eyes and recede again. They sat quite still, only moving to put down a new piece or to stir their coffee; all four were smoking and all wore their bowler hats. A waitress interrupted her vision, and she blinked, but her sight would not get entirely clear again. More men were still coming down the stairs, though all the tables seemed to be occupied. Two girls, who had long since finished their meal, showed no signs of moving. One was talking ceaselessly; the other, who held a small mirror and cigarette in the same hand, while she flicked her nose with a puff, did not seem to be listening. The waitresses were becoming more and more frenzied; occasionally the noise of breaking china could be heard through the general clatter, and an unending stream of orders was being passed by rasping voices through the hatch. Miss Thompson was not sure which she wanted more desperately, fresh air or quiet.

"Do you mind if I leave my coffee? It's rather too hot."

"But there's no hurry!"

There was not, alas! Would it matter saying that she was finding the place too hot and stuffy, just after she had said so firmly that she was not an invalid? Well, she must. She might faint, or do something silly; killed outright in the first battle of the campaign.

"The smoke's giving me a bit of a headache." (Oh, dear, had the men at the next table heard her, they would think her so rude; but you had to shout to be heard.) "I should like to get out into the open as soon as possible."

"Of course, yes, how stupid of me! I'm so sorry, dear, it was most thoughtless." Miss Green was overcome with shame. "I've got so used to it, you know; everybody smokes everywhere nowadays. I forget that others aren't so accustomed to it. Waitress! Look here, don't you wait. You go on up, and I'll follow directly I've got the bill."

"No, no, I'll wait for you." Miss Thompson knew that there would be nowhere to sit down upstairs, and she dared not go into the street by herself, feeling like this.

"Waitress! Please!"

The waitress swept by remorselessly, with no thought but that of putting down a heavy tray. Miss Green, with all her experience, had never learnt the trick of ostentatiously rising.

"It's not usually half so full on a Saturday," she said. "Of course, on other days it's much worse, like the comic pictures you see of the spring sales. Waitress! Please!"

The unhappy girl, who knew exactly when impatience developed into a formal "case", came at last.

"Three rolls, was it? Three rolls, three butter, two chops two coff, oh yes, pota-cab-two-tart."

Her pencil seemed to calculate the total automatically, and she slammed the bill on the table. Miss Green, defying regulations and rejoicing in the iniquity, winked slyly at her as she pushed a penny under the ash-tray.

"Now come along!"

At the bottom of the stairs Miss Thompson faced the decisive battle of the day. Only a few stairs, quite easy ones; she could have tackled them half an hour before, and after another half-hour in fresher air she would again be able to manage such a task quite easily; but the ordeal came at the wrong moment; she felt that she could walk along the level, but not upwards. She might be sick, or worse still she might faint. On the banister side men were still coming down.

She let Miss Green precede her, and leant against the wall. (It would dirty her coat, but the coat wasn't a smart one.) Thus supported she kept the upper part of her body as still as possible, and breathed carefully, letting her legs do the work independently. She did not look up, but kept her eyes fixed on one stair at a time, the step that was level with them. "I'm feeling all right," she said to herself, actually framing the words with her lips. To keep on saying that would prevent her from fainting, and she couldn't be sick if she was careful not to shake her body; but Miss Green would be suspicious if she lagged too far behind.

The top came sooner than she had expected.

"My dear, you're looking quite pale," Miss Green

said. "It was very stupid of me to take you to that stuffy basement. I'm so sorry."

"I'm quite all right now. It was just rather warm. No, I'm a pale person by nature."

"I know!" said Miss Green suddenly. They had paused for a moment at the top of the stairs. "The Paratone Palace!"

Delighted by her savoir-faire, her eyes twinkling, she almost ran into the street. Miss Thompson followed, breathless but refreshed by the pause and the cleaner air.

"The what?" she gasped.

"A cinema!"

It was only thirty yards down the street, on the same side. Miss Green marched through the facsimile-mosaic entrance, smiled at the commissionaire who held open the swing-door, passed through the box-office lobby and into the Palm Rendezvous. She dropped on to a plush sofa.

"Well, what do you think of this? It's a trick I've done before. It's not quite honest, of course; they think that you're waiting for your young man to take you inside. Still, it's a very good way of taking a rest, and if they make a fuss I'll pay them twopence for wear and tear."

Miss Thompson was almost too startled to reply. She had never been inside a place that was even remotely like this. On the wall opposite were two huge coloured photographs; one showed a train rushing towards a ruined viaduct, the other a girl in a top hat and pink vest and knickers, leaning back on her elbows with one leg high in the air. Still, it was cool; two electric punkahs swished quietly overhead, and in one corner a little fountain

was playing into a stone tank where goldfish swam. And the sofa was so comfortable.

"Yes, it's disgusting!" said Miss Green, "but beggars can't be choosers." She looked at her watch. "We can spare ten minutes."

She was wondering: "Ought I to go to the station with her? She might get lost or run over—she's not used to London. But there's that Surgical Supplies account. Gibby can't get on with it, because she doesn't know where I put the delivery-notes. I'm certain they've put on two items that we haven't had, but I shall have to make quite sure before I write about it. Is she really up to it? She looked so green just now. But of course people who aren't used to the stuffiness get upset by it very easily. If she seems all right when she gets to Paddington—yes, I could leave writing to Miss Drakard till Monday. The mail's on Tuesday. Did I put her letter in the basket or the top drawer? Oh yes, the drawer. The Unanswered Basket is full."

"We'll go to the station by bus, shall we? There's plenty of time, and it's not half as stuffy as the Tube. Of course, they're all covered tops now, but you can open a window."

"Are you sure you've got time to come?"

(She hardly dared to ask.)

"Yes, of course."

They waited for ten more minutes; Miss Thompson expected at any minute to see the commissionaire bringing in a policeman; Miss Green rather hoped that he would—it would not do for the Secretary of the E.W.W.M.S. to appear in the police court, but the idea of a mild rush with the

law was welcome to a townswoman. The commissioner, however, took no notice as they went out, Miss Green brazen, Miss Thompson conspicuously guilty.

"I think that's what the Bible must mean when it tells us to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," Miss Green said.

At the Bank the bus they wanted was waiting in a queue; a relief to Miss Green. She knew that Miss Thompson could not have jumped on a bus that was moving, however slowly, and she had dreaded the thought of deliberately breaking her rule, which was never to stop a bus but to defy her years by catching it on the run. The difficulty had solved itself.

"Shall we go on top?"

"Yes."

She could manage it, Miss Thompson thought, if the bus didn't move till she was up. She was a different woman now.

"I suppose these motor-buses are quite safe now?"

"Safe? Oh yes!"

Miss Thompson, as they ran along Cheapside, marvelled at Miss Green's sang-froid. Of course, the man at the wheel knew his work, but you could never be certain that these men didn't drink, and the slightest error would mean a horrible accident. It had been bad enough in the taxi, but that was comparatively small and manageable. The driver of this mammoth couldn't possibly see what was happening at the back. They were travelling at what seemed a reckless speed—surely so large a machine couldn't be pulled up in less than sixty yards or so—and they were constantly passing

other buses with only a few inches left between. If anything did happen——

"Two to Baker Street Station, please. I think you'll probably find a car to meet you, but if not, anyone will be able to tell you how to go. I think you get a tram to the centre of the town and then a bus, but anyone would know."

"Oh, yes, I shall manage all right—ooh—no, it's all right, I thought we were going to collide with that taxi."

"Which taxi?"

"It's gone now."

"I should like to give you a first-class ticket, but there's a rule against it. It's not just the question of money, but people do talk so, you know. If it got about that delegates were travelling first-class people would say: 'Oh, so that's where our money goes to!' You see what I mean?"

"But I should never think of travelling first-class, even if you begged me to. You forget I'm a Yorkshire woman. I should feel like playing ducks and drakes with half-crowns. Besides, the guard would take one look at my clothes and say that I had forged the ticket and turn me out."

"I think you ought to go first-class, all the same. If it wasn't for the rule I'd pay myself, but——"

"That's very sweet of you, but I wouldn't think of it——"

"But you must promise me one thing. If you don't feel up to giving the lecture you must just say you can't, and go to bed. I'm sure the Principal would understand. I'm sure she's a charming person, she wrote me such a very nice letter. Now you'll promise me, won't you?"

"Yes, I promise!"

But Miss Thompson was not sure if she meant to keep the promise. "She's a sweet woman," she thought, "and of course this is the way she treats all of us. She ought to have married and had a family. But it's absurd for the dear thing to talk to me like that; of course she's a wonderful business woman, and not a bit frightened of London, but she must have been in long clothes when I started school, or not born at all, perhaps. So when it comes to the question of going out—. And if I can travel to Bristol by myself and find my way to the school and give a lecture and come back looking none the worse, I shall be in a very strong position. It would spoil everything if I had to say that I hadn't been able to give the lecture. Besides, it's such an opportunity for sowing the Seed."

The bus reached Selfridge's and turned round into Orchard Street.

§

"Well, then, I think I will get back. You've got the slides? Yes, the notes are in the parcel, on the top. They're all numbered, so I'm sure you won't have any difficulty. Now the train won't be in for a few minutes yet, so I should wait here for a bit. It's much more comfortable than standing about on the platform. You've got your ticket? You'll be careful only to give up one half, won't you? Yes, I said in the wire what train you were coming by, so they're almost sure to be there to meet you. You've got money with you, haven't you? The man said that the train would start from this platform, so

you won't have far to walk. You will get some tea on the train, won't you? Well, I'm ever so grateful to you for getting me out of this fix. I do hope you'll be all right. Good-bye, dear!"

Alone again. It was strange how much lonelier you always felt when there were ever so many people about than when you were all by yourself. But it was all plain sailing now. From where she sat she could see the train come in; but perhaps it would be better to go out on to the platform a little bit beforehand. There might be a rush for seats.

Miss Green burst into the waiting-room again.

"Just a little bit of chocolate. It may come in handy. Good-bye, dear!"

"Oh, thank you so much. Good-bye."

If only, by some miracle, Miss Green would appear again at Bristol!

There were only half a dozen women in the waiting-room. Two sat together, both reading. One, a red-faced old lady, was fast asleep with her mouth open in a corner near the fire. The two nearest to Miss Thompson were talking continuously.

"I say they've got no right to hang him."

"Yes, and supposing they didn't hang murderers, where should we be?"

"But they don't know that he did it."

"Of course he did it. Who else could've done it? I saw a photo of him in the *News* and you could see 'murderer' written all over his face as plain as plain."

"But why should he have done it?"

"There's no telling. But I have my own ideas about that."

"Then why did he write that letter saying he was going to Brighton? He must've known that the police would get hold of that."

"Well, murderer or no murderer, he's a rotter, and the sooner we get rid of that kind the better. Did you see what came out about him on Tuesday? There was an actual photograph in the *Express*, him and the woman and the baby all together just as if they were a family party."

"Excuse me!" said Miss Thompson. "Can you tell me if I'm right in thinking that the 2.35 to Bristol starts from the platform just outside?"

"'Fraid I don't know. Ethel, 2.35 to Bristol, do you know?"

"Bristol?"

"Yes."

"What d'you want to know?"

"This lady's asking what time the train goes."

"No," said Miss Thompson, "I know when it goes, 2.35. I wanted to know which platform."

"D'you know which platform it starts, Ethel? The 2.35."

"Two-thirty-five to Bristol?"

"Yes."

"I believe I heard someone say they'd taken that one off. Or was it that they had changed the time to 2.20?"

"Oh, I'd better go and find out. Thank you so much."

Alarmed, Miss Thompson gathered her belongings and went in search of a porter. Finding one a few yards from the door of the waiting-room she asked: "Can you tell me what time the train goes to Bristol?"

The porter, recently imported from Swindon, considered the matter.

"Well, there's the 2.15. That's the fast one." He turned round slowly to look at the clock. "You've missed that one." He thought again, and consulted a pocket time-table. "No, the 2.15 was the slow one. The fast one's 2.35. You'll be able to get that."

"Is it this platform?"

"No, I think it's Number 5, unless I'm wrong. It's probably that one that's on there now. Shall I take your bag?"

"No, I haven't a bag, thank you. Do I go over the bridge?"

"Well, you can, but it's quicker round this way."

"Oh, thank you so much!"

She set off at a trot. The old stride which had taken her along so many miles of rough forest paths seemed to have deserted her for ever. The trot—how ridiculous I must look, she thought—was her only means of moving at all rapidly. She was hampered now by a hundred obstacles. Everyone seemed to be coming the other way, and no one seemed to be looking where he was going. Refreshment waggons and electric luggage trolleys dragging a long chain behind them kept barring the way. Turning at the bottom of the platform she could see Number 5. She did not stop to look back at the clock, but increased her pace almost to a run, crying as loudly as she could: "Excuse me!" whenever someone got in her way. She reached the barrier at last, and saw that the doors of the train were being slammed. She held out her ticket.

"Can you let me through, please?"

The man clipped her ticket.

"One minute!" he said, "wrong platform for Bristol. Bristol's Number 1. 2.35."

§

"I wonder if you know Mrs. Houghton-Lewis?" the lady in brown tweeds asked.

The lady in the moleskin coat hesitated.

"I'm not sure. I know the name, of course. Perhaps I met her at a dance. I seem to remember somehow——"

"Or Mrs. Lestworth? Yes, you must know her. Everyone who knows Farringdon knows Mrs. Lestworth."

The lady in the moleskin coat had admitted, joyfully, that she knew Farringdon very well indeed.

"Oh of course!" she said. Then, audaciously, "and her husband. I know them both very well. Such 'ni—such very charming people."

"Yes, the Major's a dear, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes, he's a dear."

The girl who had taken the corner seat facing the engine exercised her rights by closing the window firmly. She knew it would be hot. and she hated stuffiness, but she intended to finish her journey, as she had begun it, the best and least suitably dressed woman in the carriage. It was an "exact copy" dress of powder-blue chiffon, and it was protected only by a light wrap of nearly the same colour. As a final gesture of defiance to the barbarities of cheap travel she wore satin shoes which

were unmistakably evening. Her hair would be all right—it was held securely by the tight gauze cap—but there was still the risk of smuts, so this window was going to stay shut even if it meant calling the guard. With any luck there would not be a struggle. She had looked fiercely at everyone in turn as she pulled the strap with deliberate force; then she had put the violin on the rack and buried herself into remoteness behind “Whom the Gods Smite.”

The lady in the corner diagonally opposite was equally determined.

“Does anyone mind if I smoke?” she asked, twisting a Gold Flake into an amber holder. She was, in appearance, a few years older than the violinist, who looked eighteen. Rather broad in the shoulders, flat-chested and oakily made. She wore light golf-shoes. She was permanently sunburnt, and her voice showed traces of public speaking.

It was not a smoking carriage. Mrs. Safferley, in the brown tweeds, had chosen it for that reason, and would have said so to the violinist. But hearing that rather harsh voice she thought: “Well, she hasn’t produced a pipe yet, and there’s this remnant in between to act as ash-tray.”

“Thanks!” Jessie Hay said, and struck the match.

She had chosen the non-smoker because males, by their stupid conversation, by their optimism, and by their smell, annoyed her. She threw the match into the corridor and started to read the *New Statesman*.

The youngest person in the carriage sat opposite the violinist, holding a piece of chocolate in her hand, which she dared not eat. She knew that it

would be fatal to open her lips, even a little way, and for the same reason she kept her damp eyes fixed steadily on the violinist's silky knees. The only person who noticed her was the old woman opposite Miss Hay, who guessed everything from the thick, tight clothes and the green canvas bag on the rack above. She was almost certain that the rest of the girl's luggage was a brown tin trunk in the guard's van, and she longed to give her a hundred hints. She would have liked to change places with the lady in the brown tweeds, but had not sufficient courage to ask. She could get the girl next to her by changing her with the expressionless widow in pince-nez, but that would seem bolder still. The widow in pince-nez might possibly be class; she was one of the sort that you couldn't tell until they spoke.

The train ran smoothly westward. Only half the passengers in this carriage really wanted to go in this direction, but they had all bought their tickets.

"I expect you know Lady Cutterfair?" Mrs. Safferley asked.

"Oh, yes. Isn't her garden lovely?" The mole-skin lady had paid sixpence to see it.

"Sir Raymond does a great deal of it himself, you know. He told me only the other day that digging is his greatest joy in life."

"Yes, he told me the same thing once."

The old woman opposite Miss Hay had started to work energetically on a scarf already three feet in length, and was darting her eyes at each face in turn. She was determined to talk to someone. In front of her the *New Statesman*, describing the

delight of South Sea bathing and suggesting Easter in Palestine, was uninviting. The servant girl was too remote; the widow, whose vacant stare remained fixed on a photograph of Cheddar Gorge, was unearthly—she might even be a foreigner. The moleskin lady evidently thought herself class—Mrs. George could see through that even if the brown tweeds couldn't—and neither of those two ought to be here at all, taking up room that was not meant for them; if they could afford those clothes, they could afford a first-class ticket. The thin, white-haired old lady next to the *New Statesman* might be class in spite of her shabby clothes. "My own are better," she thought. She had nothing to read, and she looked rather ill.

"Very warm it is in here, isn't it?" Mrs. George said.

"Yes," Miss Thompson answered, "I didn't think the train would be so crowded. I was lucky to get a seat at all."

The girl in the far corner, who was now sniffing openly, found comfort in the sound of friendly voices. With a rush of courage she asked, in a faint voice: "Can you tell me if this train is right for Bristol?"

"Yes, dearie, quite right!" said Mrs. George, with her warmest smile.

"Thank you!" said the girl, and turned her head towards the window, so that she could cry without being seen.

"And so it will go on," said Mrs. Safferley, "until someone has the sense and courage to put them all in prison. The Macdonald man, of course, should be deported straight away."

Miss Hay had hardly noticed the old lady sitting beside her until she had spoken. Now, running a side look over her, she noticed that the eyes were blue and had something of the poet in them. She might be one who had kept on the scene of her lost illusions in the rôle of dresser, that well-known type which could tell you, without approaching the wings, how the house was taking it to-night; or she might have lost sons in the war—she had not taken off her gloves, so one couldn't be quite certain. At all events, she would do as a receiving-set, now that the brown tweeds and the moleskin had reached a point at which they were no longer tolerable.

Putting down the *New Statesman*, Miss Hay said: "Do you smoke?"

Those three words were enough, by themselves, to cause a break in the eloquence of the moleskin lady, who was agreeing that really a dictator was what the country wanted.

"Oh, no!" said Miss Thompson. She was too much surprised to add "Thank you." Surely elderly women didn't—but no doubt the lady had meant to be friendly.

"I hear," said Miss Hay, rattling up the attack, "that they're looking for a site for a statue of Robert Owen. There was something about it in the *Manchester Guardian* this morning, and curiously enough they're reviewing a new life of Owen in this paper. I've always thought it strange that people talk about him so little, when many historians recognize that he was a greater driving force than men like Shaftesbury."

"Owen, did you say?"

"Yes. Robert Owen."

"I'm afraid, to tell the truth, that I don't know anything about him."

Other women who had been brave enough to make the same confession had fared very badly; but on this occasion Miss Hay was delighted. The cue she wanted could not have come more pat if it had been carefully rehearsed.

"That just shows the importance of putting up a statue to him." Miss Hay smiled as if Miss Thompson had been at pains to do her a favour. "He was the father of British Socialism."

"Oh," said Miss Thompson.

"I think one of the chief troubles," said Mrs. Safferley, "is the altogether wrong-headed teaching that young people are getting at the Universities nowadays."

Mrs. George, lips set, bent over her knitting. The violinist, whose sense of humour was stirred occasionally by an earthquake of fun, brought "Whom the Gods Smite" a little closer to her face so that she could smile faintly. The girl opposite her, deciding to have one tremendous cry and finding that her tears had dribbled to exhaustion, ventured at last on the chocolate. The widow stared at the Cheddar Gorge.

Miss Thompson said seriously: "I don't know anything about Socialism. It's very dreadful the things that are going on in Russia."

"Socialism," said Miss Hay, shooting out her formula, "is an idea so remote from conventionalism that it sounds as incredible and impossible as a painting by Michelangelo; it is the only doctrine so audacious as to suggest that everyone has a duty and that all duties are a common duty. Conse-

quently it is the only system that has ever been conceived which can possibly be called a practical system. That is why it is apparently so impracticable."

"I wonder if you know the Whalesaur girls?" Mrs. Safferley asked. "Diana and Rhea."

"I don't think I do," said the moleskin lady, deliberating each word. "It's very stuffy in here, isn't it?"

Miss Hay accepted this as "cease-fire," and let her voice fall.

"In my work one does realize so much how individualism hampers every single movement in social progress. I don't mean only the individualism of the rich; of course that's more obvious, and heaven knows it's nuisance enough; some of these landlords! or rather it's their agents, because of course you never see the landlord, he's in his charming place in Dorset or else shooting in Scotland. But, you know, the under-dog's just as individualist in his own pathetic way. Scratch a Poplarite and you find a Tory, even if they don't think much about keeping the blacks well under."

"Of course," the moleskin lady said, "you just can't be particular nowadays. I'm always expecting to find my greengrocer's card on the hall-table."

"You see, I'm in sole charge of the W area under the Henry Nollett scheme," Miss Hay continued. "When I say in sole charge, I have to delegate responsibility for various sections of the work, of course, but I'm careful to keep my finger on every one of them. You see, directly effort becomes uncoordinated there's bound to be trouble. Housing is my main interest, and there I'm up against it all

along the line. Of course the people don't want to move from the pigsties their families have lived in for generations, and my friends always say: 'Why try to make them?' It's the same thing with the M.D.'s. We've got a special centre for them and I always try to get hold of the children as early as possible. I can spot them almost at birth—they form fifty-four per cent of the population, so you get to know the signs—but of course the dear mammas always know better, and if they do admit that anything's wrong with little Billie they say: 'Oh, that's a bit of the ole grandad in him,' and think that a whipping will put it right. That's why you'll never get anything done until you've got the whole of the community behind you in the shape of a law."

"I suppose not," said Miss Thompson.

"And of course the law will never catch up with sociological ideas so long as there's only about a dozen women in Parliament. Nearly all these things are essentially domestic matters, and no man can see that they have any importance. Of course they would do something if they were pressed by public opinion, but the extraordinary thing about English public opinion is its bat-blindness to any evil which is staring it in the face. If there's an earthquake on the other side of the world Londoners will subscribe half a million before you can say 'Knife!' And look at that new stadium in Ontario. Three quarters of it was built with English money. But if I ask for a couple of hundred to get a crèche started at New Cross I have to spend ten pounds in postage-stamps before I can raise half of it. In my own district alone there are not less than five

square miles which ought to have been pulled down years ago and rebuilt, and whenever I talk to a Member of Parliament he tells me that there just isn't enough work in the country to go round and the only thing to do is to persuade people to buy more and more wireless sets. Will you have a cigarette? Oh, you don't smoke, I forgot. So the present position of affairs is that if I want to rid a district of its most notorious brothel I first visit the police, who say that they have no evidence and can't see how to get any, and then I write to the local parsons and they say that they don't want to be mixed up in that sort of thing, and then I go to see the local member and his secretary sees me and tells me that Mr. Bump is taking a much-needed rest at Cowes. Then I have to write to the Borough Council and the Home Secretary and half a dozen other nitwits and finally I see the manageress of the brothel and tell her that if she doesn't give me the name and address of the proprietor I'll get her ten years hard, and run the risk of being imprisoned myself for blackmail. Then the round starts again, and if people would only give their money to putting up a few gymnasiums within a three-mile radius of Lambeth, instead of putting up stadiums in Ontario, there wouldn't be any customers for any brothel. Fearfully stuffy in here, isn't it? D'you mind if I open the door?"

"Of course, it's some time since I was there last," said the moleskin lady. She was fighting a losing battle. "I've been spending much more of my time in Surrey lately. I have a lot of friends there, and it's so much easier for my husband to join me at week-ends. He spends a great deal of his time in

town, now that this South American business is keeping everyone so busy."

"Are you going to Bristol?" Miss Hay asked suddenly.

"Bristol? Yes." Miss Thompson was startled at the stranger's interest in her affairs.

"Ghastly place, I always think. All breweries and tanneries. Nice country all round. Do you know it well?"

"No, I've never been there before."

"Are you going to stay in the city?"

"No, I'm only going there for one night. I'm giving a lecture—at least, a sort of lecture—at a girls' school near there—Huntersfield."

"Oh, Huntersfield? Nice place. I lectured there myself not long ago. Awfully nice girls."

How in the world, she wondered, did a dear old thing who'd never heard of Robert Owen come to be lecturing to a school which had got four Newnham scholarships only the year before? Perhaps she was one of these oddities who knew all about birds or folk-dancing.

"I always think," she said, "that the great thing is not to talk down to an audience of that sort. So many people seem to imagine that schoolchildren have not got beyond the nursery stage, and they make a point of not using words of more than two syllables. As a matter of fact, children of that age have got more intelligence than most London theatre audiences. Of course they couldn't possibly have less, but you see what I mean? Don't you think so?"

"I really couldn't say. I'm afraid I've very little experience."

She hoped that Miss Hay was wrong. But could such a person possibly be wrong about anything, any matters of fact? Miss Hay's words had suddenly turned her eyes towards the gigantic rocks looming ahead. She had said to herself, getting into the train: "I'll sit quite still and rest again for twenty minutes, then I'll get out the notes and see if I can piece them together a bit." Before the twenty minutes were up Miss Hay had dragged her from duty, and listening with only her ears she had let her mind wander, not unpleasantly. It was very uncomfortable, she had thought, sitting in this stuffy, smoky carriage, and her head was aching. Still, if you could survive a short journey in a stuffy carriage you could survive a long journey, however rough, in a wind-cleaned ship. Three weeks of sea air would be just the thing to bring her back to full strength, now that she had reached the advanced stage of convalescence. Surely Miss Green would see that argument, and use a little influence with the doctor. ("I think Dr. Thompson must be quite all right now, Doctor; she's been on deputation work lately. Yes, she managed the journey to Bristol and back quite all right.") Of course, there would probably be a long wait at Cape Town or somewhere, but even so she might see Peter, and Nuwova, and Elsa, in eight weeks' time. Eight weeks, it was long enough. Perhaps it would only be seven, if she was lucky. She might find a tourist agency in Bristol—oh, no, to-morrow was Sunday and everything would be closed. The great thing was to get this trip over and see Miss Green again and make her understand how important it was to start back at once.

But now this young lady had pointed to the obstacle that had to be overcome before the bigger plan could be developed; had not only pointed to it, but revealed it in all its hideous immensity. Only a few hours to go, and she would be standing in front of that audience, "much more intelligent than an audience at a theatre." Of course, her headache would be gone by that time, and the long period of sitting still would have renewed her strength; there would be a table or something to lean against, she hoped. But would the slides speak for themselves, as Miss Green had said they would? There were the notes, of course, but she could not merely read those out; she would have to connect them up somehow. She might fill in some time by saying something about her own work, but there was so little of that that you could say anything about—it was just bandaging and giving out medicine and teaching children and holding services and talking to people. It wasn't like organizing committees and talking to Members of Parliament as the smoking lady did. Easy enough to make a lecture out of that. "She's a practical person doing some very big work; I just try to make people better as well as I can and make them Christians. It's just what every Christian woman does wherever she is, so what is there to say about it? But if I could just give them some idea as to how badly my Tulasus need help from white people!" That thought spurred her, fought against the growing acuteness of her headache. One part of her mind, nevertheless, kept repeating: "There might be an accident to the train, and I might be injured. Or I might find that the school is in quarantine, or that they have not

received Miss Green's telegram and have got another lecturer." Things would be all right somehow. She knew that she could always trust the Pilot, but memory told her that faith could never keep the heart beating at the normal rate.

Mrs. Safferley was still in full cry after the mole-skin lady.

"He's a nephew of the Bishop's, of course."

"Oh, really? I didn't know that."

"And his sister's a charming girl."

"I don't think I've met the sister."

The train went smoothly westward.

Miss Thompson got up to take down the notes from the rack. Mrs. Safferley at once spread her generous limbs into a more comfortable position. When she tried to take her place again Miss Thompson found that she could only sit on the very edge of the seat—to reach the back would have meant forcing her companions further apart, and Mrs. Safferley, it was obvious, did not intend to be forced. She was, in fact, trying to keep a clear two inches between her shoulder and that of the girl in the corner, who looked as if she would be sick at any moment, and who, besides, might have something on her. You never knew, with that sort of person. It was one of the trials of having to travel third. Third it must be, because you could laugh off that mode of travel but you couldn't laugh off last year's clothes.

"Anyone for tea, please?"

Miss Hay rose at once.

"I'm ready for it!"

The moleskin lady looked at Mrs. Safferley.

"I don't think I will," she said slowly. "There's no pleasure in eating on these jolting trains."

Mrs. Safferley was performing rapid calculations. She was rather short for the week-end, it was most important to arrive at the Frasers' in a taxi, and equally important to tip on a big scale, since servants, on one's next visit, responded to generosity in a manner that was noticed by a quick-eyed hostess. On the other hand she did not want it to get about in Farringdon that she was a person who travelled third *and* went without tea. Still, considering that this person knew practically no one——

"No, I hardly think it's worth the trouble of going along. One's tea always slops over."

"You?" asked Miss Hay of Miss Thompson.

She might, of course, pick up a good audience in the restaurant-car, but more than likely she would find herself opposite a tobacco-manufacturer, or a young author or something, and the *New Statesman* had been sucked dry.

Miss Green had, indeed, given Miss Thompson two shillings and made her promise to get some tea. There was nothing very binding in promises of that sort, and more useful things could be done with two shillings, and it was time that she got on with studying these notes.

"Do you know if you can get just a cup of tea, without anything else?" she asked.

"Yes, I should think so, but I can recommend the Great Western buttered toast. Come along!"

Miss Thompson followed her down the corridor, both elbows raised and figure swaying at every step. She wished, before she had finished half the

perilous journey to the dining-car, that she had been more prudent.

Mrs. Safferley took the corner seat, and the moleskin lady crossed over, both joyously easing out their limbs. The violinist, lowering her novel a little, gazed after the departing ladies, and longed to follow them. But she could get a cup of tea cheaper at a place she knew just outside the station—if there was time. And they might—if she had time—give her something after the charity performance. They ought to. All very well to say something about it being a good advertisement—it wasn't much good advertising yourself to the sort of people who went to a charity performance; that sort didn't know Bach from Offenbach. They would have to give her a cup of tea and a sandwich, surely, unless they realized that these clothes were for the evening performance at the Harder Hall and that otherwise they would have been served up with the green marocain. The girl opposite put the rest of the chocolate in her mouth and let it dissolve as slowly as possible. "You mustn't expect to get your meals until you've cleared away in the dining-room," had been one of her mother's last injunctions. What time, she wondered, did people have supper in the dining-room? She looked with expressionless eye into the corridor, where a long stream of men was passing. The widow stared hard at the Cheddar Gorge.

"Well, I've no use for that sort!" said Mrs. George, as soon as Miss Hay was out of earshot. "Socialism and all that wickedness!"

"It's extraordinary," said Mrs. Safferley to the moleskin lady, "how people can openly defy the

regulations, and no one seems to say a word. I should have thought the ticket-collector would have noticed and said something."

"Of course we could make a complaint."

"Yes, but of course one doesn't like to do that. She seems to be an educated person of sorts."

"Yes, that's just what makes it so difficult."

"Would you mind if we had the window open?"

But the window could not be opened. The violinist, who knew most things about looking smart on artistes' fees, had risked the permanent loss of a penny by jamming it into the crack.

§

"That sort of female makes me sick," said Miss Hay, holding a piece of toast in one hand, and a teacup and a cigarette in the other. "There were a lot of them at St. Hugh's when I was up. They're the kind that marries without any inclination or aptitude for maternity but just because they haven't the brains to get them through the world by themselves. Have some more toast? No, I ordered double quantity specially. I can't bear eating all by myself. Leave room for some cake. Stuffy in here, isn't it? I can't suggest opening a window, because if I did all the males would die of pneumonia."

Miss Thompson thought it was slightly less stuffy than the carriage they had left, and the tea was reviving her. "But I do hope this toast won't be very expensive," she thought, "I must be firm about the cake."

"Waiter, some cakes, please!" said Miss Hay.

“As I was saying, people talk about the home as if it had the same sort of magical goodness about it as pure water and spring flowers. They forget that the purest water is absolutely teeming with microbes and a good many flowers are weeds that destroy the farmers’ crops. Of course you find a home that runs smoothly just here and there, or appears to run smoothly—probably concealing every kind of repression in every member. But the majority of homes are pure fakes. In the poor homes the woman and the elder daughter are worked to death and are too busy to give the man the only kind of amusement which could possibly rival the jollity of the pub, and the younger children quarrel all day long in imitation of their parents until they reach the age of fourteen, by which time an underpaid school teacher has taught them all he knows, that is to say that twice two are four, and they are sent off to knock nails into packing-cases or stick labels on to bottles from eight till six every day for the rest of their lives. You see what I mean? Well, are the rich families any better? There you have the boys sent to Rugby or some such place where they swallow an enormous amount of superficial knowledge—oh, yes, you must have one of these Japs, they’re awfully nice—and as the father and mother have probably risen in the world and in any case haven’t been to school themselves for twenty or thirty years they can’t understand what their children are talking about, and they try and sit on them with their ‘experience’ until both parties cease to be on speaking terms and the children have to be sent off to remote corners of the Empire to restore the family peace.—They are nice, aren’t

they? I always have them.—The whole point is that the English are by nature the most bourgeois people in the world and the bourgeois never will be happy unless his life is scientifically regulated. That's where the naturalist social philosophy breaks down. Have you read any Laski? Quite interesting, as far as he goes. Of course, they *say* they want freedom, but the people who talk most about freedom are those who obey every law of convention that was ever invented. More tea?"

Again she filled Miss Thompson's cup almost to the top, so that a trained juggler could not have raised it to his lips, on a moving train, without spilling it. Miss Thompson spilt a good deal. The hot tea, the close air, the motion of the train, seemed to have affected her sight a little, so that the waiters were misty as they swayed up and down the aisle, and even Miss Hay's face, a few inches away, had the outlines of an expensive photograph. She could hear what Miss Hay said so much less clearly than she heard a high-pitched staccato voice on the other side of the aisle which was saying: "I told her when I last saw her, at Ranelagh. If you attach yourself to a sentimentalist you know what to expect. Of course six hundred for two people sounds all right, but you never know how long it will be two, whatever you think now. I'm always saying that it has to be one thing or the other. But of course she won't believe me." The windows were obscured with mist. Miss Hay lit another cigarette.

"You may not agree with the ethical theory that the moral sense is derived from law, but it's a very good practical theory to work on. Directly the law says that people must be clean and decent and must

bring up their children properly and must pull down ugly houses, they'll find that their conscience tells them to do these things. Look at female suffrage. Twenty years ago my mother was cold-shouldered at a country house-party because she had expressed a desire to have a voice in choosing the nation's legislators. That was in the Melton Mowbray district, I admit. And only the other day, when I refused to vote for either of two candidates, both of whom were male and congenital idiots, I was publicly lectured by a duchess for my lack of patriotism. Nowadays it's considered as much a woman's religious duty to vote as it used to be considered her duty to bring twelve undernourished and mentally deficient children into an overcrowded wage-market. Waiter, a bill please! Are you quite sure you've had enough?"

"Yes, that's what I've said to her all along," whipped the voice on the other side of the aisle. "You've got to make up your mind; if you won't take anyone else's advice it's no good saying when things go wrong that you hadn't the chance to see both sides. Waiter!"

"And may I have my bill too, please?" Miss Thompson asked.

"Oh, did you want them separate?"

"Oh, I've paid," said Miss Hay.

"Oh, thank you! How much did mine come to?"

"Oh, that's all right! Shall we go back now?"

They started the long journey back to the carriage, Miss Thompson protesting and thanking as the train threw her from side to side, Miss Hay throwing conversation over her shoulder. "So many

people—won't join in the common effort—chief fault of our sex—maternity—vicious conservatism of outlook—silly little errands—ridiculous places like China—trying to persuade—better religion than their own."

"It was very good of you," Miss Thompson said.

"Not at all!"

Miss Hay had reached the door of the carriage. She smiled at Mrs. Safferley, a smile that pushed her almost roughly out of the corner seat. The moleskin lady crossed over. The violinist glanced up and quickly hid herself again behind the novel; the sight of Miss Hay made her feel hungry. The girl opposite had begun to sniff again.

"It's less stuffy now, isn't it?" said Mrs. Safferley.

"Less smoky!" said Mrs. George, knitting viciously.

It was slightly less stuffy, Miss Thompson thought, and she really felt better for her tea. She took out the notes; at present no word of the closely-penned manuscript stood separate from its neighbours, but her eyes would grow steadier in a minute or two. Her face felt very hot, but she had perspired a little and this had brought relief. She let her eyes rest for a moment on the grey collar of the widow's dress, then shut them. As soon as the image of the carriage was blotted out—the round figure of Mrs. George, the straight, staring widow, the smile on the pretty, engaging face of the moleskin lady, the thin silk legs surmounted by "Whom the Gods Smite," the mirror and maps, the untidy assortment of bags on the rack—Gahuga formed itself, projected on the obscurum which took its place; not

as seen in a stereoscope, boldly perspectived, but a map, roughly drawn, a tree and a hut sketched in here and there, the details only indicated in shadowy lines. The map grew outwards, stretched to Homar Town; the sea was somewhere near, not quite in the picture; and faces hovered, like spirits, refusing all but the filmy essence of substantial shape. The details became a little clearer, one at a time, but their reality was overcome by the foreign smell, a smell of tobacco-smoke, eau-de-cologne, and Princess of Roses. The voices grew more distant. "Reginald Holmes." "At a dance last Christmas." "A wonderful tennis-player." "Yes, to Cannes, I hope." Miss Thompson thought: "I must look at those notes directly my eyes are clearer." She woke in the dimness and bustle of Temple Meads Station.

§

The rain had been coming down all afternoon in a fine drizzle, teasing the citizens of Bristol when the wind took it, unexpectedly, and drove it between hat and mackintosh. The crowd watching the Rovers had come to realize only by degrees that it was wet to the skin. Now the wind had grown stronger and was bringing more rain with it. The streets were for the most part empty, save for those who were hurrying to buy a few week-end necessities before the shops closed. First-house queues had not formed yet—they would be short to-night. The restaurants were crowded, and from these, at intervals, young men smoking their pipes upside-down ran towards the car-parks. Newspapers lay

in the gutters and on the pavements; men had read the stop-press and grown impatient with the damp, clinging sheets. The packed trams dragged a wave of muddy water on each side as they clanged along the streets. Tyres hissed on the oily surface. Shops had already lighted their windows, and these threw out an insipid yellowness against the fading daylight, giving only a weak suggestion of a warm indoor world.

"No, I'll take her along," said Mrs. George, "a bit of extra rain won't hurt me. I'm an old woman and I wear sensible clothes."

Miss Thompson had not expected to find a limousine waiting for her, and the chauffeur was still walking up and down the platform, occasionally accosting some lady who appeared to be lost or anxious, while Miss Thompson herself, standing in the doorway of a jeweller's shop near the Tramway Centre, was debating with Mrs. George as to which should take the young servant to Aberdare Court.

The girl herself was frightened as well as miserable. The deafening hugeness of London had been softened for her by the presence of her mother, who had maintained a steady fire of exhortation till the moment the train started. Bristol she had expected to be rather like Maidstone. Its size was crushing. These two old ladies seemed kind, but her mother's words—"Now don't you go paying no attention to anyone who speaks to you, you just go straight to the first policeman you see and tell him to put you on the bus for Aberdare Court"—were still sounding in her head.

"But can I leave the poor young thing to this

old woman?" Miss Thompson wondered. "I'm sure she's honest, but she's never been here before and she doesn't seem to have very much idea how to get to places."

"It's quite likely that I shall find the street I want close by," Mrs. George continued. "Now you just look after yourself and leave the girl to me."

"Well, you must let me pay for the bus. That's my share."

Miss Thompson gave her a shilling. She had saved that through not having had to pay for her tea.

"Well, that's very kind of you, I'm sure."

Glancing in all directions, Mrs. George suddenly caught sight of a tram which bore in twelve-inch blue letters on a red background the words "Harris Abdominal Corsets."

"There it is!" she cried.

Seizing her own and the girl's bag in one hand, the girl's arm in the other, she ran towards the tram.

"Good-bye, thank you!" she shouted over her shoulder.

The girl said nothing.

The rain turned suddenly, driving into the doorway where Miss Thompson stood. She lowered her umbrella to ward it off. A moment later, raising the umbrella again, she saw the two odd figures scrambling on to the moving tram. "Poor things!" she thought. "I really should have seen them both to their destinations."

Those who passed were all hurrying, and she did not like to stop them. There was a policeman fifty

yards away, but it was so important not to get wet unnecessarily; she had no clothes to change into, and to be prevented from going back by a cold would be a tragedy too great to be borne. It occurred to her to ask for directions in the shop. She never liked going into a shop when she had no intention of buying—it seemed so cruel to raise the shopkeeper's hopes—but this was a case of dire necessity. She paused for a few moments, summoning courage, and then went inside.

A girl and a young man with spectacles were talking to each other in short sentences, weary of each other's company, depressed by the noise of steady rain outside, longing for half past six.

"Huntersfield College?" the young man said. "Yes, it's about half a mile from Huntersfield village. You go on one of the green buses, Number Twenty-three."

"No," said the girl, "it doesn't stop here. It starts in Pool Street. You go towards the station and it's the fourth, not the fifth, turning on the left after passing Melsom's."

"Oh, thank you!" said Miss Thompson.

"You know Pool Street?"

"No, but I'll find it."

"I'd better come along and show you. I'll just put on my mac. It won't matter, will it, Harry?"

"'Gainst rules."

"Oh, you certainly mustn't bother!"

"No bother! Look here, Harry, if Mr. Harley does come in, tell him I found I'd forgotten to post a receipt."

The girl went into the back of the shop and returned with a mackintosh and umbrella.

"Nasty night, isn't it?" she said, following Miss Thompson out of the shop.

"You really shouldn't have bothered to come."

"Oh, it's nice to get a bit of air. Yes, it's against the rules, but the rules are so silly. If there are two customers between now and closing it will be a record for a night like this. Of course we have to keep open till half past six in case someone remembers suddenly that they haven't got a diamond tiara to wear in church to-morrow. That's what they call service to the public. The only argument against that is that if anyone in Bristol wants a bit of jewellery they go to the pawnshop. They're a queer lot round here. I come from Nottingham, myself. Where do you come from?"

"São Maharo."

"Oh!"

"Or perhaps I should say Wakefield. I was born there."

"Oh, that's near London, isn't it?"

"No, in Yorkshire."

"Oh, of course, yes. I remember hearing people talk about the Dean of Wakefield. He committed a murder or something, poor old chap."

The bus was waiting in Pool Street, driverless and empty.

"Good-bye, thank you so much!" Miss Thompson said.

"Not at all! Good-bye."

Miss Thompson sat half-way up, where she thought there would be least draught. The bus filled gradually, and became warmer. She had kept her clothes fairly dry, but the rain had dripped off her umbrella and soaked her ankles. "Still, I'm

used to that," she thought. Her hands were very cold, and though it was warm in the bus she shivered a good deal. "Well, it's made my brain clearer, anyway. Trains make you feel so sleepy." The bus was very cosy after the wretchedness of the streets, and now, as the increasing darkness emphasized the street lamps and the lighted windows of shops and houses, she could look with a certain pleasure at the scene which the rain on the glass blurred into unreality. The umbrella was a nuisance—there was nowhere to put it where it would not wet herself or the man sitting next to her. She might put it under the seat, but then it would get trodden on, and it was Miss Green's umbrella. The parcel with the slides must stay on her lap. If only the man hadn't such prominent elbows she might get the notes out again—but when the bus started it would probably be too joggy to read them. The draught was coming in a little, from the top window near the front, but probably someone would shut it when they started. "How nice of that girl to come along!" she thought. "I should never have found this street by myself."

The bus was quite full when it started, six minutes later. Several passengers were smoking. They turned right and passed through the Tramway Centre, where the changing lights seen through the rain-assaulted windows made a fantastic pageant of colour; along streets with shops blazing their wares to hurrying umbrellas and heedless traffic; the street lamps passed by as a wavy white line, then as blurred suns coming rapidly after each other, then with decreasing frequency.

The fare was sevenpence—four pence outside

Miss Thompson's calculations. It was too joggy to read the notes.

§

The girl from the jeweller's had underestimated the distance—it was fully three quarters of a mile from the place where the bus stopped to the gates of the school, and the drive was nearly a quarter of a mile long; but the rain was not so heavy at Huntersfield; the wind, stronger over the high ground, was sweeping the clouds along, spilling only a little, so that they could drop their full weight into the city.

The drive opened into a quadrangle, built on three sides. The central building was patched Elizabethan, the wings modern but in the same style. Near the door of the centre building an Austin Seven and an Austin Twenty stood side by side, patiently enduring the rain. Miss Thompson, folding and shaking her umbrella, touched the bell, which rang loudly. She was kept waiting for half a minute. The sound of scales, played faultlessly on a bad piano, came from the building on the left, and when this stopped she could hear voices; no laughter, but a number of girls' voices, talking rapidly and monotonously. They were too far off to be understood.

A maid dressed in grey, with cream-coloured muslin cap and apron, opened the door. The hall inside was long, and its length was exaggerated by the narrow boards of the polished floor, parallels which nearly met at the far end by the fire-place. In the centre there was nothing to break this

polished extent. On the right were small, fine-legged tables, with a silver card-tray, a time-table, a telephone with a glass mouthpiece; on the left, two fine-legged chairs and a small settee. Except for a barometer, the most elegant article in the hall, the only ornaments were oil portraits of heavily-bejewelled ladies of the previous century, framed surprisingly in narrow and austere-moulded gilt. The walls—so much as was left by curtains and mirrors—were modern-panelled with old wood which had been too highly polished. The many red curtains, which might conceal either doors or passages, gave an air of falsity, suggesting the manifold exits of a stage, and this unreality was augmented by the mirrors, which stretched from ceiling to floor. Two electric chandeliers flooded the hall with a cold, white light, which the polish on floor and walls reflected remorselessly. The fire-place contained an electric heater, constructed to give an amateurish imitation of glowing coals. The glow, feeble in competition with the chandeliers, did nothing to diminish the arctic vastness. Parents remembered this hall better than they remembered the dormitories.

"Is the Principal at home?"

"What name, please?"

"Thompson—Miss Thompson."

"Doctor Thompson?"

"Er—yes!"

"Will you wait a minute, please?"

The maid shut the door—it swung silently on perfect hinges—and went away through one of the curtains at the far end of the hall. Miss Thompson heard her footsteps tapping on the wood as she

went down a passage. A door opened and closed. Then there was silence, except for a clock which, somewhere out of sight, ticked fussily, chu-uck tok, chu-uck tok.

Would it be wrong to sit down? The maid hadn't asked her to. It was nice to be out of the wind, but she wished there was a carpet, or a cobweb somewhere. It wasn't like a school at all. Perhaps that was better. Even grandness was less alarming than a school. But the school part had to come. Well, these things came. You had to go through them. It was really one stage on the journey back. A horrible stage, but on the journey back. Did many lecturers arrive without night-things? Well, that would be a way of breaking the ice, perhaps. A stage on the journey back.

The maid returned at last; the distant door opened and closed, the tap of the footsteps grew louder, the curtain parted.

"Will you come this way, please?"

Miss Thompson followed her across the polished floor, on which her boots sounded much louder than the maid's little shoes, setting up reproving echoes in the chaste hall.

PART IV

HUNTERSFIELD

THE ball came in hard, but the Mauve wing stopped it neatly, turned and drove it towards the centre. The right inner took it, dribbled a few feet, and finding herself in a crowd sent it out to the wing, who dribbled it nearly to the half-way line. Then it travelled across the field again, wing to inner, inner to centre, centre to left-inner, then back again to centre, and again to right-inner. Centre had only just got rid of it in time—a blow from the Orange centre-half, intended for the ball, nearly knocked the stick out of her hand. Right inner again sent it out to wing, who failed to trap it and let it roll into touch.

The Orange team leant on their sticks, panting. They were up one goal, but for the last fifteen minutes they had only twice been out of their own half. The Mauve forwards, whose combination was a by-word, had come to the top of their form and were working supremely well. They had been coached remorselessly, every spare half-hour on the field, running, passing, running, passing and shooting. The drudgery had produced results. To-day they seemed unable to make a mistake, and the soft ground, against all expectation, was failing to check their pace. For Orange, now that their last big effort had failed, there seemed to be only one hope, that of desperately tackling, spoiling,

muddling, and upsetting the formidable Mauve line till time. It was the task of a man with a cudgel opposed to a brilliant sabreur. They had done it well, but it could not go on much longer.

The Mauve line was in position, each man placed with meticulous accuracy. A shrill clamour of "Mau-auve!" rose from the touch-line, immediately answered and drowned by "O-ringe!" The ball was thrown towards the Mauve goal, but in an instant the right-half sent it back to the Mauve wing, and there was a shout of "Centre!" The ball was intercepted by the Orange centre-half, who, stopping it with her foot, drove it far up the field, and started to run after it, limping. The whole of the Orange side, goaded to another effort by what looked like a sudden chance, advanced at the run. One of the inners had it, and seemed on the point of breaking through, but the Mauve defence closed in, and the ball was lost to the spectators in a scrum. A moment later the Mauve centre appeared, dodging out of the crowd, with the ball on her stick.

The Orange defence was taken off its guard. The halves were level with the forwards, and the backs, losing their heads in the elation of sudden fortune, had gone up too far.

Someone shouted wildly: "Get back, get round them!"

Goal, her heart thumping, saw the three inside forwards coming towards her, ventre à terre, practically unopposed. They were only feebly harried by the whole Orange side in breathless pursuit. She saw the left-inner trip and fall, but the other two came on, running over a clean field, the centre

a few feet ahead and holding the ball. Five yards from the circle, centre gave the ball too strong a tap and let it run loose. The Orange goal, seizing the opportunity in a flash, ran out. Two sticks met with a noise like the crack of a whip. The ball, held in between them for an instant, rolled away backwards towards the right-inner's stick. It was just outside the circle.

The right-inner tapped it over. There was no one within two yards, and she had the open goal in front. Realizing by instinct that she was not quite in position she gave one more tap before making her shot. From the touchline came an agonized shriek: "Shoot!" She raised her stick. So suddenly that it seemed a devil's miracle, a figure pitched itself on the ground beside her and the ball, struck simultaneously by two sticks, shot across the goal-line, a yard from the post. The Orange centre-half picked herself up, grunting. A long blast sounded on a whistle.

"Thank the lord!" said the centre-half. "Have you seen a tooth anywhere? I've got one missing."

The cheers perfunctorily exchanged between the sides were drowned by the sustained uproar on the touchline. Barbara Gastell left the field quickly, trying to disguise her limp, and broke the crowd with so glowering an expression—lips stuck together, fierce eyes directed straight ahead—that no one stopped her. A small girl held out her blazer.

"Thanks!" she said, and threw it over her shoulder. Climbing the bank towards the kissing-gate she overtook the main vanguard—a few parents, local residents, a loungee or two, people who did not understand the game and had no idea

who had won. At the gate a little queue had formed of girls who were determined to get to the fires and make their toast before their seniors arrived, hoping that the Games Committee had not noticed them. (If so, they would be spoken to, but they could say truthfully that they had stayed till Whistle.) They held back to let Barbara go through. She said: "Slackers!" under her breath, but plainly noted no names. She had brushed past a few girls on the cinder-path, reached the head of the file, and was nearly at the railway bridge when she heard someone call "Barbara!" She turned round. It was Miss Jonnel.

Miss Jonnel had out-manceuvred the first toast party by walking along the railway line. She vaulted over the fence one-handed and joined Barbara on the steps.

"Well played!" she said.

"Oh, thanks!"

"I thought Eileen was through. She had the goal in her pocket. I can't think how you managed to catch her."

"No, I didn't think I would, but it seemed worth trying. One gets used to seeing a particular pot on a particular part of the mantelpiece."

"It was a wonderful game."

"Yes, I quite enjoyed it."

Miss Jonnel was slightly shocked. Barbara always shocked her.

"My dear girl, you mustn't talk in that blasé way."

"Well, how many games have I played this term—this term alone? However, this one was quite exciting."

"Quite exciting! I should think—hullo! I didn't see you were limping. Oh yes, I remember now I noticed it in the game. What happened?"

"It's nothing much." (But she was obviously finding it a painful effort to get up the Governors' Field, the last stiff climb before the school was reached.) "The Mauve forwards are very admirable, but if the ball isn't anywhere handy they hit the first pair of legs they can see."

"When did it happen?"

"Well, first of all at the beginning of the first half. Then it went on happening. They also rather rudely removed a tooth. However——"

"You poor old thing! Well, you won, that's the great thing."

"The game's over, that's the great thing."

"Are you trying to make me rise?"

"No. No, I enjoyed the game ail right, when it was on. I was feeling rotten when it started, and I felt I'd rather be boiled in oil than play hockey. Still, there's a lot in having a spot of Irish blood. It warms you up quicker thar a cocktail."

They had crossed New Court, walked along the Terrace, and turning into the Prefects' Hall they stood talking outside the Prefects' Room. Barbara opened the door and threw her stick into a corner.

"Yes," she said, "I don't know what I'd do without my wee spot of Irish gore. It must be awful to be quite sane all day long. Do come in!"

Miss Jonnel followed her into the Prefects' Room.

"You're not suggesting that there's anything insane about playing hockey?"

"Well, I wouldn't deliberately rub you on your tenderest spot."

"No, but honestly, what exactly do you mean? Are you a genuine Modern Girl or something, or just a poseuse?"

"Well, neither, I hope. But surely you must see that if your blood isn't up properly and you stop to think about it for a minute it does seem most awfully silly to be making such a colossal effort and enduring so much discomfort in the hope of hitting a piece of leather between two wooden sticks."

Silently Miss Jonnel besought all the Deities of Bedford to look down and bear witness to this blasphemy; but she was a person of even temper—her blood, at all events, was good Sussex back to the Tudors.

"But you're cultivating stamina; guts, if you like the modern word."

"Guts, yes, exactly, but what for?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, just for more hockey?"

"My dear girl, stamina is one of the most essential things for the human race."

"I suppose it is. But what's it for? I mean, it always seems to me that there's plenty of stamina lying about. The question is, how is anyone to use it? It's all very well for men—when they've got a surplus of stamina they go off and use it up in a war. A girl never finds anything to do with it, except being a mother occasionally, and a few things like that."

Miss Jonnel knew the names of most of the bones in the human body, and where the arteries

were; but this kind of problem was outside her province.

"Look here, you really must get changed, or you'll catch cold," she said. "Come and have tea with me?"

Barbara hesitated. She liked the Jonnel, but tea would mean a post-mortem on the whole game.

"Thanks awfully, but I'm afraid I'm booked."

"Well, we'll talk it over another time. Of course there are heaps of uses for stamina. I'll send someone up to put on your bath."

She went off in search of Greta Stole; really it was absurd that the girl didn't know the offside rule by this time.

On her way upstairs Barbara met Désirée Foster.

"My dear, congratulations," said Désirée. "Of course I never can understand that game, but they tell me you were simply staggering. Do you know, I was so fearfully keen about it all that I watched with my own eyes for nearly all the first half. Then Muriel and I found the most staggering little dog we'd ever seen, and we had to play with it for the rest of the time. So glad we won! I think the p is such a duck, it has such heavenly lines, if you know what I mean."

"Yes, it's a good pot," said Barbara.

She went slowly along the passage—she was getting stiffer every minute—pushed open the door of Tennyson with her knee and slammed it after her.

Twenty minutes later she was sprawling, half-dressed, on her bed, when someone banged on the door.

"Come in!"

The small, spectacled face of Mary Kennick peeped round the curtain of the cubicle.

"Hullo! Fagged?"

"Yes, rather. Not one of my merry days."

"Bad luck!"

"Those Mauve forwards are bolshies."

"Did they foul?"

"No. At least, not more than we did. Everyone fouls when they're slithering about in the mud. But they've hacked my shins to bits. Not to mention a tooth."

"But how does one knock a girl's tooth? I should have thought it would be sticks."

"I was lying on the ground."

"But dear old thing, wasn't that rather lazy? I mean if they're running along in a hurry to get to the goal and they see your tooth lying about on the ground, you can't expect them to pass by on the other side. You'd hardly expect them to say: 'Do you mind turning round, it's your legs we're after?'"

"Instead of pouring forth your sympathy, I wish you'd look for my gugs. Someone's pinched them."

"You're probably lying on them."

Barbara sat up.

"The most ghastly thing about you," she said, "is that you're so often right."

"Well, hadn't you better finish dressing? The bell's gone for girls' tea."

"Blast girls' tea!"

"Said she in a superior manner, having obtained the status qualifying for exemption. The more exclusive tea will be cold, by the way. Also the toast."

"I'm relying on you to make me a special supply in your bood. I don't feel up to the society of the gay girls in the P.R. Pass me those shoes, will you?"

Slowly she finished^d dressing.

"Who's taking girls' tea, by the way?" she asked.

"You are, officially."

"Good lord, I'd forgotten!"

"It's all right. I made Rosemary go and take it."

"Oh, thanks awfully."

"No trouble, my dear. Rosemary's so full of Christian spirit she'd take anything."

"Does she still belong to the piety squad? I forget."

"Yes. But she's not as bad as she was."

"I'm glad you got me out of that. I don't feel up to anything. I shan't do a spot of prep. to-night."

"You won't have to try. Lecture"

"Oh, so there is. What on, do you know?"

"The usual."

"Heathen?"

"Yes."

"Oh lord!"

They walked along the terrace together, sheltering beneath a common mackintosh flung over their heads, up to the second floor of the New Building, and into Mary's study.

"I'm out of milk," Mary said. "We might try and borrow."

"Don't let's bother."

Barbara flopped into the basket chair.

"Hullo, you've got a new picture.

"Yes. Dirck. Like it?"

"No."

"Highbrow!"

"What does it represent?"

"A street in Montmartre. What about an egg?"

"Oh, thanks awfully!"

"Two?"

"Have you plenty?"

"Heaps. Going bad."

"Righto! Two good ones. Thanks."

"Blast this stove!" said Mary. The paraffin had come through in liquid form and was blazing merrily.

"Hadn't you better prick it?"

"Haven't got a pricker."

"Shall I try and borrow one?"

"Don't bother. It'll be all right in a moment. No, that shelf was burnt when I bought it."

Barbara pushed herself further back into her chair, and swinging up her legs rested a heel on the door-handle.

She asked: "Do you think the Wrent would notice if I cut the lecture?"

"Couldn't help it, darling. The Wrent can't see an empty chair without wondering who should be on it."

"It's a curse. I'd much rather sit in a comfy chair in my bood and go to sleep over Chateaubriand."

"I'm afraid only an impending schol. would get you off a missionary. If it was League of Nations or Roman Britain you could say you wanted to put in a spot of Romantic Period and might get away with it. But the Wrent has to maintain the high traditions of the College. If one of the Gover-

nors heard that she'd let a prefect cut a missionary she'd be sacked on the spot. Look here, start on this cake. It's a bit stale."

She took half a large cake out of a cupboard and threw it lightly. Barbara caught it.

"Want a knife?"

"Never mind."

She wrenched a piece off with a sharp twist of her fingers.

"Plate?"

"Thanks."

Barbara caught it in one hand as it planed towards her chest.

"You know, it makes me pretty savage, this continual ladling out of missionaries. I mean, damn it, there are other things in life worth doing besides rushing after the poor blasted heathen with a Bible in one hand and a hymn book in the other."

"I know, darling. Still, it'll be the last this term. Eggs'll be ready in half a mo."

"I wouldn't mind so much if it wasn't always compulsory. It's like chaining a child up in front of the Hallé Orchestra every day of its life and hoping to give it a love of music. They simply defeat their own ends."

"But, my dear, if they did I should howl with glee. The thing is they don't. The school's sent out so many mishes that if you went to Africa or somewhere you'd find about four O.H.'s gathered round every unsaved negro. And the total rises every year. You must admit that their policy works."

"I suppose it does—Yes, this egg's fine, thanks. Is yours all right?—Well, does it? The people they

rope in are all out of the piety squad. They'd pack off to China complete with Bible just the same if there were no lectures at all."

"I suppose they would. Nasty little beasts."

"They ought to be made to stand up all through missionaries, or else kneel on a specially prepared rocky surface."

"My dear, persecution only fans the flame of bigotry. You must know that."

"That's the trouble. What can you do with them? What would you do, if you had an absolutely free hand, with the Salington female?"

"My dear, passion would be too strong. I should take off all her clothes and whip her."

"What a ghastly thought! I'm sure Audrey looks perfectly foul without any clothes."

"Bad enough with them."

"There are rumours that she has been known to wear dark brown gugs with grey stripes. Still, we'll give her the benefit of the doubt. No, but seriously, what could you do?"

"I don't know. Piety's a disease. It's no good telling a madman he's mad, because he only says: 'No, it's you that's mad,' and unless you convince him that he's mad you can't do anything. Have you got a comb on you, I can't find mine?"

Barbara produced a pocket comb.

"I wouldn't mind if it was just madness. There's something so unhealthy about it. It's rotting the school."

Mary withdrew a piece of bread from her mouth and registered solemnity.

"High-Souled Prefect Alarmed by Lowered Tone of Huntersfield," she announced.

Barbara grinned.

"Sorry! But I do think there's something spiritually indecent about piety. All that little-talk and little-prayer-together business. It's like flaunting one's soul naked in the market-place."

"Your imagery's very rich, darling."

Neither heard the first nervous tap on the door, but the second was a little louder.

Mary said: "Come in!"

The door was pushed open slowly.

"Hullo!" said Mary. "Is girls' tea over?"

"Yes. Is Barbara Gastell here, please?"

"Behind the door."

"Hullo!" said Barbara. "What do you want?"

It was a small, plump girl, with a round and very red face.

"Oh, please, I wonder if I could say my poetry."

"Well, you know that better than I do. What poetry?"

"The Rape of Lucrece."

"Did I set it?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Talking in prep."

"All right. Do you mind, Mary? I'll go along to my own bood if you like."

"No, it's all right. If you don't want me to stop eating. I'll try and eat quietly."

"Thanks. Have you got the book?"

"Yes, here."

"Where did I tell you to start?"

"Now is he come unto the chamber door."

"I've got it. Go ahead."

"Now is he come unto the chamber door that

shuts him from the heaven of his thought which with a—a——’”

“‘Yielding latch.’”

“‘Which with a yielding latch and with no more hath barred him from the blessed thing he sought.’”

“Stop!” said Barbara. “What blessed thing?”

“The blessed thing he sought.”

“Yes, but what was it?—All right, go on!”

The little girl was speechless. Barbara prompted.

“‘So from himself——’”

“‘So from himself the blessed thing is barred.’”

“No,” said Barbara, “not the blessed thing. ‘Into the chamber wickedly he stalks.’ Go on from there.”

“‘Into the chamber wickedly he stalks’——”

Silence.

“Have you learnt this?” Barbara demanded fiercely.

“Yes.”

“All right, go along!”

“My dear, was the Rape of Lucrece a very lady-like choice?” Mary asked when the door had closed.

“Yes, dear,” said Barbara. “Mr. Shakespeare handles the little episode with the greatest delicacy.”

“You let the kid off very lightly.”

“Oh, she’s the conscientious type. That’s why I didn’t bother to make a note when I set the impot.”

A moment later there was another knock on the door. A girl with a flat chest and spotty complexion came in.

“Please Mary may I have leave off the lecture to-night?”

“Ask Barbara.”

Matters of seniority were nicely observed.

"Please may I have leave off lecture to-night?"

"Why?" said Barbara.

"I don't feel well."

"Have you been to Miss Carry?"

"I couldn't find her. She's not in her room."

"Try again!" said Barbara briefly.

The girl went out.

"Baggage!" said Barbara.

"I think she is a bit ill," Mary suggested.

"Yes, a bit, probably. But it's all nonsense about not being able to find the Carry. The thing is that the Wrent always endorses my leaves and she sometimes jibs at the Carry's. Mollie knows that. She does everything by back-door methods. She's perfectly fit to sit out a lecture."

"She will probably be one of England's leading politicians."

"Not if I'm in Parliament. Darling, I was wrong about that etching. Now that the light's going I quite like it."

"Sweet of you, darling."

Barbara could hardly see Mary's face against the window. It was better so, because Mary's face only showed the superficial part of her. The best Mary was buried fathoms deep. "I'm sorry, but God was using up old stock when he fitted my dial," she said; and she wore hats, in fashion and out, which came well down to her eyebrows. The horn spectacles were for improving vision. Barbara remembered seeing her for the first time, standing on the terrace with her back to the railings. "What dowdy little girls we import nowadays," she had said to Margaret Peters, "scholarship, I suppose."

"You're scholarship yourself." "Yes, but I hope I don't look like one." Curious, only four years ago.

The warmth of the study was increasing, with the heat of the primus stove conserved by closed windows and fortified by human breath. Barbara turned in her chair so as to rest an elbow on the low arm, slipped a cushion under the elbow, and found the position perfect. She felt pleasantly hot in her cheeks and stomach. Her legs still gave her some pain, but now she found the pain pleasant to endure. It was the sense of having got it all over, all the wretched things of the day; the tricky period on Sisam before lunch; changing in the cold dormitory; the jumpy feeling before the game, waiting about for the refs.; the horrible fighting for breath with a sharp pain in the chest, for the first ten minutes. She shouldn't have played of course, after feeling moving-stairway all morning. But she had got through it.

"There are times," she said, "when I consider that there's something to be said for hockey."

"I find I can enjoy my hot bath just as much without it."

Mary was piling up the cups and plates, sitting in her chair and using one hand. Uncanny, the way she followed your thoughts. Anyone else would have said: "Find the laurel-crown comfy, darling?"

"I feel almost ready to enjoy the missionary, if it wasn't so damned uncomfortable in Speech Hall."

"I wouldn't mind the discomfort if the mishes weren't so sloppy. 'Now India, girls, is ever so many miles away from England.' Uuh! they make me sick."

They would have to put the light on soon; but not just yet, unless Mary wanted to read, and Mary wouldn't suggest it, even if there was a novel waiting open on the table. There was that about her. People who said: "Do you mind if we have the light?" were only being insincere.

A bell clanged. It was away in Old Building, and the wind carried most of the jarring noise away in the other direction; but it meant that some poor things had to go and do something—would it be deten. or roll?—and by hinting at the comparison it increased Barbara's comfort. There were not often such moments. She wriggled again, letting her clothes rub delightfully against her skin. A cigarette would make it perfect—that was a disadvantage in the lordly status—but perfection was not of this world. The distant sounds, laughter and voices and a goods train rumbling in the valley, increased the sense of isolation. A balloon drifting low over a city. Merited peace.

The warmth intoxicating her senses a little she was ready to do miracles; to save lives from a burning building, to hold the door against a company, to defy a petty world. And yet, in her warm comfort, she felt a rich friendliness radiating to cover everyone she knew. She was ready to sign the leave for Mollie McStower, if the little twit had the nerve to ask her again. The girl probably had her points; she would clap as sportingly as any other Mauve when the pot was presented at the concert. They were a sporting crowd at Huntersfield, with all their faults. All except the piety squad, and they couldn't help it. Mary was sitting silent, leaning with one arm on the table, only her outline

visible now against the window. So like Mary not to talk. There would be light and brave noisiness in the hall at dinner; a happy prospect, but now was the time for glowing silence. She rather wanted to take Mary in her arms; there was a sweetness of faint immorality in the idea. Fortunately Mary was not an embraceable person. Yet another perfection of Mary's; so sane and ugly that it was quite safe to feel a bit romantic about her after a hot bath. From a study at the end of the passage came the sound of a gramophone. The Waltz from the "Merry Widow." It was exactly right. She turned to rest her weight against the other side of the chair and closed her eyes. If only it wasn't for this wretched lecture. Still, there was time to go before that.

"You know, I should be doing the general essay," said Mary.

"Should you? I haven't done mine."

"Well, let's have five minutes more."

"And then, instead of doing general essay, we'll read some Sainte-Beuve. It's equally improving and not half so bothersome."

"All right, five more minutes."

But from the bottom of the stairs came a laugh they both knew.

"Désirée!" said Barbara.

"I have my methods, my dear Watson."

"Better stick on the light. You know Désirée's stories."

"No, wait! If she doesn't see a light she may go on to Helen David's."

They heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs, coming up slowly with a stamp on each step. Then

several doors were opened in turn, and a weary voice said: "I fupprove the girlv are all at the lite-wawy fofietv."

"Sybil!" said Mary softly, and added: "All the Philistines."

The door was rapped and flung open.

"No one there either," said Désirée Foster.

The door half closed, then opened again, and a hand switched on the light.

"Hullo, I thought I saw someone!"

"Womantic twilight!" said Sybil Armour tonelessly.

"Darlings, we're terribly sorry to intrude," said Désirée. "I'm afraid you were having the most staggering silent communion, weren't you?"

"We were too lazy to put on the light," Mary said.

"Well, have you heard the staggering news?"

"No," said Barbara, without enthusiasm. After half an hour's absence Désirée was never without momentous information.

"My dears, it's simply drastic."

"Ftaggerwing!" Sybil agreed.

"You know this mish——"

"What mish?" Mary asked.

"The mish who was to come to-night. The lecturing mish."

"Yes?"

"He can't come."

"Well, thank God for that!" said Barbara with finality.

"But my dears, that isn't all. That's not the really drastic part."

"Oh, come on, spit it out!" said Mary impatiently.

She faintly disliked Désirée; too pretty, too well-dressed, too rich; and how was it that the Wrent let her play the fool with her eyebrows? Still, not so bad as Sybil, with her everlasting languor and her off-duty lisp.

"The Lesage wired for another mish."

"Did she get one?"

"She did."

"I see," said Barbara. "The first mish is off but a new one is on. Well, we are grateful for advance information, but we fail to appreciate the difference between mish A and mish B. In our humble opinion one mish is just as bad as another mish."

She was thinking: "How did the girl get six credits in the School Certificate? Still, she's not as bad as Sybil. Sybil's got no guts, mental, moral or physical." It was Barbara's *bête-noire*, gutlessness.

Désirée, who cultivated assiduously the practice of small gossip, launched her *dénouement* with dramatic precision.

"Female!"

"How ghastly!" said Barbara.

Mary would not play up even to that extent.

"Oh, how do you know?" she asked.

"Sybil went to see the Lesage about something, and she saw the telegram."

"It was right under my nose," Sybil explained.

"My dears, really I do think it's rather drastic. It's bad enough to have these staggering lectures at all, at the end of a palpitating week, but if it must be a mish one does expect them to serve us up with something in trousers."

"The Lesage is a tyrant."

"Well, the piety squad will be pleased. They like them in petticoats—a sort of promise of things hoped for."

"You're entirely right, darling. We saw Rosemary and told her, and she said she would tell Jane Heald and get her to summon a special prayer-meeting in celebration. Darlings, let's attend, shall we?"

"No!" said Barbara, rather sharply.

It was not so much that the joke would be undignified as a feeling of horror at the thought of the experience. She had been to one of those meetings, in her first term, and had come away terribly snocked. There was something indecent in that almost familiar way of talking to and about the Divinity. Indecent—that was the only word that fitted the case. "I suppose," she thought, "that if I were a thorough-going atheist I wouldn't mind. But even then I think I would." Of course there was nothing wrong with some of the squad in normal life. Rosemary, for instance, she was quite a good sort, a really generous character; but even she always had something in her eyes which made you a little bit frightened of her.

"Well, what shall we do?" Désirée demanded. "We can't find anybody anywhere. We shall have to go to the lit. soc."

"Oh, my dear, what a howible idea!" Sybil showed a momentary animation.

"What are they reading?" Barbara asked.

There was just a chance that if it was something Restoration Désirée would go; she had always an eye for flavour and vocabulary.

"Birds of Aristoph.," said Mary

"My dear, how frightfully mouldy."

"Have you done your general?" Barbara asked.

"My general!" Désirée was horrified. "I never touch the general till Tuesday evening. I don't even know what the subject is. I wrote it down on an envelope and I've lost it. What was it? Something about birth control?"

"No," said Mary. "Family Allowances. Theory and History."

"But how staggering. Is it in the Enc. Brit.?"

"No," said Barbara, "it's in a book by the Hammonds. Eight hundred pages."

"Well, darling, if you're doing yours to-night you will be a darling, won't you? I promise the likeness won't be recognizable."

"Shan't have time to-night."

Désirée sighed. In the strictest privacy she practised sighing before a mirror; born with a flexible mouth and long lashes, she yet left nothing to chance.

"I do so miss Arabella. Her generals were always so modifiable. Oh, that reminds me, did you know that Arabella's got a most heavenly bijou flat in Knightsbridge? I went to see her. The most drastic colour-schemes."

"What does she do?"

"My dear, I haven't the faintest idea. She's supposed to paint or write books or something. But I heard rumours that she was using it as a one-at-a-time club."

"Oh, what howible scandal!" said Sybil piously.

"Who told you that?" Barbara asked. She had known Arabella only slightly, but had marvelled at her rich beauty, beauty away beyond the water-

colour prettiness of the usual Huntersfield show-pieces.

"Well, you know my brother Teddy; a most awful little worm, you know, but rather amusing in his way. Well, he got to know Arabella somehow, I don't know how, and he told me he'd met another man who knew her. Well, he said to this man: 'I do think Arabella dresses awfully well, don't you?' and he said: 'I don't know, I've never seen her dressed.' Of course, Teddy may have been lying, or the other man may have been——"

"——Or you may be," said Mary.

"Darling you are rather spiteful."

The gramophone broke out again, a loud needle driving the "Wedding of the Painted Doll" remorselessly through four thin partitions. Désirée's feet began to point and slide.

"I say, we must go and tell Helen," she said.

"Tell her what?"

"About the female mish."

"Oh, but I'm so comfy here," Sybil complained. She was sitting on the floor with her back to the door, her chin between her knees.

"Nonsense, darling! Come on, Helen'll be wiser if she finds out that we knew and didn't tell her." Stooping gracefully, she caught Sybil's ankles and pulled them forward till her shoulders were on the floor.

"Oh, Désirée, you beast, leave go! You're spoiling my clothes."

"Bye-bye, pets."

Jerking Sybil to her feet she led her out of the room. Her turns required a dummy. A moment later the gramophone stopped and her voice rang

down the passage: "My dears, have you heard?" A door was slammed.

"There was a time," said Barbara thoughtfully, "when I quite liked Désirée."

Mary said: "I still like her, about once a term. She can be quite amusing, when she has anything to work on. Of course, in this ghastly hole she gets no material. It's really rather stag—rather amazing that she keeps so cheerful."

"I wish she wouldn't. I'd much rather see her in mourning."

"My dear, she'd be the most festive mourner you ever saw. She'd have something in black chiffon, cut in the ultra-ultra, with light grey cuffs and a triangle of grey across the skirt. But you mustn't take her too seriously. She'll be all right when she grows up."

"Well, she may be. I hope so. But I'm afraid she'll get engaged the moment she leaves and get married in Eaton Square. That sort nearly always does."

"Well, it may do her good to get married. The whole idea of marriage is to reduce silly women to a state of sobriety by the scourge of children and husbands and what-not."

"But Désirée would never look at a man with less than three or four thousand a year."

"I don't know. Sometimes these ladies go in for patronizing the poor. Désirée rather likes something fairly silent as a background. She may go after some business man."

"You mean a sort of Sybil?"

"Sybil, exactly!" The tone in which Mary pronounced the name, without the help of the

smallest gesture, thrust Sybil into the rummage-box.

"Gutless," said Barbara.

"Should be roughly peeled, plunged into cold water, shaken thoroughly, and wrung out."

"You know," Barbara continued, "the more I see of this world the more I think you can divide people into two classes, those who have guts, and those who haven't. That's the one shining thing about Désirée; of course she'd crumple up and sit down if you hit her on the tummy with a fountpen, but she isn't afraid of anyone. I mean not morally. I always remember the time when she answered the Wrent back. She's the only person alive who's ever done that? Do you remember?"

"No."

"It was something to do with borrowing someone's racket without permission or some silly rot like that, and in the course of her lecture the Wrent said: 'So long as you're at Huntersfield school rules are every bit as important as the laws of the land.' Désirée just looked at her in a sort of is-the-woman-daft fashion, and said: 'Which rules are as important as which laws?'"

"Did she really? What did the Wrent say?"

"Oh, something about the General Principle, and she wouldn't argue, and so forth. You know how feminine the Wrent gets whenever something really does rattle her. Anyway, Désirée said: 'My dear Miss Wrent'—just like that—'My dear Miss Wrent, surely you're being rather rhetorical.' Why Désirée wasn't sacked on the spot I can't think. Fortunately the Wrent lost her temper completely and had to be rather mild afterwards on principle."

"I never heard that story before. It shows she has got something in her."

"Yes, somewhere deep beneath the expensive exterior she has got some guts."

"Or else a very thick skin."

"No!" said Barbara. Her philosophy was at stake. "Guts."

Mary noticed, as Barbara herself did not, that as she said the word she clenched her fist, only for a moment.

"Shall we have a go at the general?" Mary asked.

"Oh hell!" said Barbara.

§

"My dear," Désirée was saying to Helen David, "neither of them would be thrilled by anything. We found them sitting in the dark in the most drastic silent communion, Barbara of course all flushed with clean and wholesome athletics and bathed in gore and what-not, and Mary gazing at her with adoring horn-rims, and they were both so wild at us coming in that they were catty all the time we were there. Weren't they, darling?"

"Povitively arctic!"

"And Mary said it might be a Siamese twin mish for all she cared. You know she really enjoys all the tortures they give you at this drastic school."

"She's a very high-minded female. I wonder she hasn't succeeded in converting Barbara."

"Well, it would be rather a ten labours of Hercules to convert Barbara. Do you know she's got a photo of Lenin in the drawer of her dressing-table?"

§

The rain fell in a steady drizzle, and whenever a door was opened gusts of wind drove it inside. In the porch outside the prefects' hall groups of girls collected, shivering, with mackintoshes over their heads, and then ran along the terrace in twos and threes, disappearing in the gloom and seen again for a moment in the patch of light outside the gymnasium windows. In the form rooms they huddled near the fire, tired and rather miserable in the patch of boredom that comes a few days before the end of the term, when the term itself is worn out, the trunks have not yet been taken up to the dormitories, and the hours, too closely watched, stretch out to monstrous length. There was work to do, impositions, mending, and odds of preparation which were always postponed and piled up in the week to make a fearful total. If one of the prefects came in they would be hounded off to the gym or the lower library or the hobbies buildings—"Members of the school are expected," the rule said, "to employ their leisure hours usefully, and should not remain in the Form Rooms except for purposes of study"—but the prefects would not be so unsporting as to make a disciplinary tour on such an evening; except perhaps Rosemary Tellon, conscientious to the point of satanic tyranny, and Rosemary would probably be working herself up for the feast of worship to-morrow.

Raw material for gossip was running low in the Lower Classical Fourth, and fitful cross-talk was nearing the point where plans for next hols. would be vaguely discussed—the conventional and deli-

cately handled swagger-match between possessors of car-owning and yacht-owning parents. The game of the afternoon had been elaborately overhauled by those who were themselves promising players, the rest enjoying the acrimony of the dispute; and when other things failed it came up again and again.

"Well, from where I was I could see from the Jonnel's face that she thought Phyllis ought to have passed. She always thinks she can't trust anyone else."

"Well, she's the fastest wing in the school."

"Yes, but she had three Mauves in front of her and there was no one inside."

"I don't know where Orange would have been without Barbara."

"Barbara's a Jezebel."

"Well, she can use her stick."

"She's jolly brave. She was limping in the first half."

"Well, she's a Jezebel, all the same. Did you hear what she did to Mollie McStower?"

"No, what?"

"Mollie went and asked for leave off lecture, and she refused to give it to her point-blank."

"Yes, she hates Mollie."

"But why should she give it her?"

"Well, Mollie was as moving-stairway as she could be. You could see she was."

"What did she do?"

"She got leave from the Carry."

"Of course, Mollie does pretend rather."

"That's no reason why Barbara should be down on her."

"I heard Barbara say once she wished she could use a horsewhip sometimes."

"The Wrent likes her."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I just know."

"Did she tell you?"

"Perhaps she always sends the Wrent a Christmas card."

"Lots of people do that."

A knock at the door created a diversion, and a head popped in. There was a general outcry.

"We don't want any mouldy thirds in here!"

The intruder smiled placidly.

"All right, then I won't tell you the news."

"Oh, come on, don't be silly! What is it?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes. Go on!"

"It's a lady mish to-night, not a man."

"Oh, gosh!"

"Is that all?"

"Mouldy Lower Fourth!"

The door closed.

"That kid's too saucy."

"She'll have it taken out of her when she comes up."

"I wish Barbara would deal with her."

"She won't. She's got a pash on Mary Kennick, and Mary would beg her off whatever she did."

"My dear, how could anyone have a pash on Mary?"

"Well, I'm certain Mary isn't pashed on her."

"Well, I believe Sybil Armour is rather."

"How awful, having a lady mish!"

"She's sure to have a squeaky voice."

"Do you remember that drastic one last term? 'Aoh gairls, if you could only see those puwer natives in all their degradation and sewperstition!'"

"Oh, wasn't she staggering? Do you remember the way she kept hitting her Bible and saying: 'This is my constant travelling-companion in far-away Japan'?"

"Bang! bang! 'This is what the Japanese call a Woodi-woodi. It isn't a bit like an ordinary English deck-chair.'"

The mimicry flowed on happily and grew more boisterous until it was interrupted by a step outside. This time there was no knock, but when the handle of the door turned half a dozen girls had reached their desks; books had appeared magically, and those who had not taken precautions were sharing with their neighbours.

Rosemary Tellon stood in the doorway awkwardly, very nervous. She was cursed with a self-consciousness that made her disciplinary work a nightmare. She looked rapidly round the room; it was approximately in regulation order. She knew that the scene had been hastily staged—the sound of the scuffle alone would have told her—but her errand was not official, and she kept to the path of greater resistance.

"We're holding a little meeting—a little prayer-meeting—in Chaucer at a quarter to seven, as a sort of little preparation for the lecture. I don't know if anyone here would like to come?"

She waited, smiling faintly, with cheeks very red. Her eyes were shining with a ghostly light. She was very beautiful, superlatively feminine. No one was frightened of her when she steeled herself to

severity, but when she smiled like that, with the ghostly light in her eyes, you could not let your eyes rest on her face.

There was no reply.

"Well, if anyone likes to come, we shall be glad to see you."

She went away.

"Gosh! That woman makes me creep when she's in a piety-fit."

"Well, let's hope the lady mish won't be as bad as that, anyway."

The minute hand had moved lazily forward through ten minutes. It must get to half past seven sometime. Then there was the lecture; that would pass an hour or an hour and a half. Better than prep. anyway. You could go to sleep if you were next to someone who didn't mind being a prop. Then prayers and then bed. That was another run in the cold to chapel, but you would soon be warm in bed afterwards. No work till Monday, anyway, and that would be a day and two nights nearer. This time next Saturday!—if it ever did come.

The news—it was good enough in the end of term drought—had travelled backwards and forwards across the chilly court and through draughty corridors to the cheerless form-rooms and hobby-rooms.

"Lecture cancelled!"

"No, it isn't. There's a female mish coming."

"Gosh, how staggering."

"Well, only a few more days."

"Well, better than prep!"

"No, I'd rather do prep."

For the eleventh time that day the bell clanged drearily.

§

“Dr. Thompson!”

The maid, retiring, closed the door so gently that the draught-excluder hardly rattled.

The drawing-room, a huge angle-shaped room, had been decorated and furnished by a London House, in grey relieved by scarlet, and though the perfection of its detail gave it the semblance of a museum piece it had, when the curtains were drawn, a certain warmth, a character which suggested that it could be lived in by those who habitually changed their shoes on coming indoors. The warmth came not so much from the little basket fire, which indeed burned brightly in a tidy way, as from the electric bulbs which, hidden behind irregular polygons on the walls, sent out their light through different lenses, some white and some lightly tinted, giving gay autumn to the room in general and midsummer brightness in those patches, as near the fire, where one would read a book. The thick carpet, dove-grey, was slightly darker in shade than any of the other decoration. The furniture, catalogued as Queen Anne, was modern in style as well as execution, uniform and simple, but tending to prettiness. On the walls hung small water-colours, separated from their narrow silver frames by a vast expanse of white margin.

Miss Thompson stood in the doorway like a scene-shifter accidentally left on at the rise of the curtain.

“Good evening!” she said firmly. With surprise,

she heard in the words a Yorkshire brogue, long since grown faint but returning to magnify the occasion.

The Honourable Augusta Lesage rose slowly and smiled.

"How do you do!"

She spoke in a very low contralto voice. Miss Thompson noticed first her simple grey dress; it was longer than the current fashion, and accentuated a height that according to rule should have been offset. Miss Thompson guessed that it was expensive—another woman would have known the price to the nearest 500 francs.

"I'm so sorry that my man missed you. It was very stupid of him."

"Your man——?"

"I sent the car for you."

"That was very good of you. I—I'm so sorry I missed it. I hardly expected to be met."

"Do come near the fire. I'm sure you must be cold."

Miss Thompson drew her chair nearer the fire; it was, unfortunately, a low one, and she could not hide her boots beneath it. The rest would not matter, if only it wasn't for the boots. Miss Green should have told her; of course, dear Miss Green was rather haphazard in her methods occasionally. She had vaguely pictured a school like the one she had attended herself, half a century before. She could still remember, faintly, the principal's room, with the old cupboard-desk piled high with exercise-books and a sewing-machine standing next to the globe in the corner. Still, this person seemed very amiable. She scrutinized Miss Lesage's face easily,

because Miss Lesage looked at you without ever letting her eyes meet yours, perhaps by focussing them on your nose. It was handsome—a widow's face, Miss Thompson thought. The eyebrows were darker than the hair above, the nose long and straight, the upper lip very slightly moustached. Not so remarkable, the face, as the very long slender fingers of the white hands. Pianist's hands.

"It was very good of you to come at such short notice."

"Oh, I was glad of the opportunity." The brogue, happily, had retired to its wonted unobtrusiveness.

"Was your train very crowded?"

"It was, rather." She felt an impulse to say "Miss." Not that this person was like a school-mistress, but so tall and composed.

"Of course on Saturdays there is nearly always a crowd."

"Oh, yes, of course!"

Already Miss Thompson felt that she ought to take a lead in the conversation. Not that it was necessary; Miss Lesage would go on asking soft questions till supper time; she would never show any sign of boredom. But she would be bored. It always made you feel worse to bore polite people than to bore rude people; Miss Saule, for instance, she was not easily bored, but when she was she abruptly changed the subject; so you knew her measure and that made things easy. This Miss Lesage might be bored either by silence or by loquacity. You ought to try both.

"I'm afraid I've come without any things," Miss Thompson said.

"Things?" Miss Lesage asked very gently, not

lifting her eyebrows, but turning her head a little to one side.

"Night things. You see, I had no time to go back to my lodgings before I started. I——"

"Oh, we shall be able to lend you everything. There's no difficulty at all. I'll make arrangements now."

She stretched up one hand to a little table, took a pencil, and scribbled a note on a memo-tab.

"Would you be good enough just to ring that bell?"

Miss Thompson had to look carefully before she could see the tiny silver button. She pressed it but heard nothing.

"How many girls have you?" she asked.

"How many?" Miss Lesage paused; it was one of the things she learnt specially before seeing parents or for occasions such as speech-day. "Somewhere between three and four hundred," she said doubtfully and added with confidence: "We have some charming girls."

"All ages, I suppose?" Not a good question, Miss Thompson realized, but better than saying: "Oh, have you?" or, "Indeed?" which would sound mistrustful, however carefully pronounced.

"Er—yes, practically all ages." Miss Lesage's voice faintly betrayed absence of mind. "Miss Wrent!" She pressed down the flap of the little envelope and held it out. Miss Thompson, turning her head, started at seeing a maid close behind her chair.

"Miss Wrent, Madam?"

The maid took the note and retired noiselessly. Miss Lesage had scribbled: "Dinner to-night will

be semi. Please circulate staff. Come down when you can. A.L."

"Not younger than twelve," Miss Lesage added. Then: "I suppose you find that a great deal of your time is taken up by meetings and so on, now that you've retired?"

"Oh, I haven't retired."

"Oh?" It was only a second's pause. "I must have confused your name. Perhaps it was another Dr. Thompson. I think I saw in the Record that a Dr. Thompson was retiring from—was retiring from the field last autumn."

"No, I shall be going back in a few days' time. At least, within a few weeks, I hope before."

"Of course," Miss Lesage continued, "one does get confused about names sometimes. The College supports so many societies, and we try to keep in touch with the activities of each one, but it's difficult sometimes."

"It must be," Miss Thompson agreed.

"I think there are really too many societies, don't you think so?"

"Perhaps there are."

"It's the same round about here. I should think there are fifty different women's organizations in Bristol and round about. I spend my whole time presiding at meetings, and I often think we could quite well dispense with half of them. I was talking to Miss Hay about it when she lectured here not long ago. Have you ever met her?—such a clever woman, though of course I don't agree with her politics—and we had quite a long argument as to who was president of the New Era Women's Guild. She said that I was, and I thought that she was."

"And who was right?" Miss Thompson asked brightly.

"I beg your pardon?" Miss Lesage's mind had already moved away, seeking the next topic. "Oh, I think we found in the end it was someone else. I'm not sure if it wasn't the Duchess of York. Let me see, you're not in any way affiliated to the S.P.G., are you?"

Miss Thompson hesitated. "Oh, no, I come from Yorkshire."

Miss Wrent, already dressed for dinner, came in with a bustle.

"This is my assistant, Miss Wrent. Dr. Thompson."

Miss Wrent was fifteen years senior to Miss Lesage, and had served in the same capacity under the previous Principal, the almost mythical Dame Louisa Stewarde. Dame Louisa had turned her hair grey and almost destroyed her nerves, but not her courage nor her eagerness.

"I think that perhaps Dr. Thompson would like to see something of the school. Or are you too tired?"

She was too tired, but anything would be better than sitting in this fairy-story room, with her boots only a few feet from Miss Lesage's high-arched silver slippers. Besides, she had had a rest and was quite warm again. It didn't so much matter being tired when you were warm. And perhaps it was more headache—at this moment—than tiredness.

"I should like to very much," she said.

"Come along!" Miss Wrent said. For Miss Thompson she used her untitled-parent manner, which differed little from the girls-below-sixth.

Miss Lesage smiled graciously with a slight

inclination of her head. Miss Thompson felt an almost irresistible impulse to retire backwards.

"It was very good of you to come at such short notice," Miss Wrent said, leading the way along a passage. It might be the same passage as the one along which the maid had brought her, or it might be another—Miss Thompson was not sure. "I expect the train was very crowded?"

"Yes, it was, rather."

"They nearly always are crowded on a Saturday. If you wouldn't mind sitting in my study for just a few minutes. I've just one or two things I have to do——"

"Of course. Really, there's no need for you to trouble—if you gave me——"

"No trouble! I like showing people round."

They were in Miss Wrent's study. It was really the Principal's study, but the large roll-top desk belonged to Miss Wrent.

"Now will you take that chair. I think you may be interested to see this—it's the latest number of the college magazine."

Without more fuss Miss Wrent sat down at the desk and began to write, dealing very methodically with a pile of forms, taking them one at a time, writing something, and forming another pile, inverted, on the other side of the desk. Miss Thompson, turning the pages of the magazine, saw in succession the Mauve Hockey Group, the Mauve Lacrosse Group, the Orange Hockey Group, the Brown Gymnasium Four. She would have liked to use the time for studying the lecture notes, but the maid had taken away the parcel and it would cause trouble to try and get it back.

Without ceasing to write Miss Wrent said: "This has been a record term for us. Only four 'flu, cases, and no measles. Last year we had half the school down with measles."

"Oh, really?"

"And of course it's always the scholarship girls who go down first."

Miss Wrent had finished the pile, but another one, slightly different in shape, was waiting for her. Miss Thompson turned back to the first page of the magazine, where she read: "EDITORIAL. *Oh Wind, If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?* It would, perhaps, be unjust to cavil at the poet, but is he not himself guilty of some injustice? Comparisons, we are told, are odious, and would not Mater Natura, benign author of all the seasons, who gave to Winter her special sweet tang, the bittersweet of cold sanity, cry out . . ." Her eye fell through two paragraphs, to the words: "In lacrosse we have been less fortunate, but the winds of adversity, in the shape of a broken arm and a case of concussion in the first and second teams respectively, have been stoutly resisted."

"I think we have a good magazine," Miss Wrent remarked, glancing up for one second.

"Are you the editor?"

"Oh no. The head of the Modern Side usually does it. Sometimes the head of the Classical. I just blue-pencil anything libellous. You would think," she went on, running through a pile of letters, "that parents would be content to let me superintend their children's discipline on the last day of term. No less than six mothers are staying in Bristol this week-end and they must all have their

daughters with them directly after breakfast. I'm going to get Miss Lesage to sign the leaves—I won't be responsible myself." She was writing "Returned by D.W. Apply to the Principal" on each of the leave-slips. "There's plenty of room for the mothers in the chapel—they don't deceive me with all this chat about St. Mary Redcliffe. Some of them don't even bother to do that. I don't know what Dame Louisa would have said."

So like Miss Green, Miss Thompson was thinking, although she looked different. But not so grown-up, somehow. Of course, Miss Green could never talk and write at the same time.

"Dame Louisa?" she asked.

"Yes." Miss Wrent stopped writing for a minute, slightly flabbergasted. But she recovered her poise. "Dame Louisa Stewarde. She was our founder, of course." She added, not satisfied with Miss Thompson's expression: "The greatest woman of the nineteenth century—excluding the Queen, of course."

"Oh, yes!" Miss Thompson said.

"I thought when she died that the College would fall to pieces. I couldn't see what we should do without her." She hesitated for a moment. "We were very lucky to get Miss Lesage—she gave up the prospect of a great social career to join us. A very remarkable woman. She has an uncanny judgment of character. She seems to be able to estimate everyone's ability at sight. She can tell a great deal just from handwriting."

Miss Wrent glanced at her watch. One of the synchronized clocks was fixed to the wall above her desk, but she always consulted her own watch.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "I had no idea it was so

late. I'm afraid you won't have time to see anything much before dinner."

"Well, really—" Miss Thompson began.

"There would be time just to see the New Science Building, it's our greatest pride at the moment. It was only opened in October. Would you like to?"

"—Yes, I would."

It would be ungracious, Miss Thompson thought, not to want to see the New Science Building.

Miss Wrent suspected that the assent was partly politeness, but she could not get through all she had to do with this dear old thing talking all the time. The old lady felt a bit tired, perhaps, but there were three hundred and sixty four girls who constantly felt tired and who showed no interest in the New Science or any other academic buildings. People's feelings had to go by the board in this life.

"I'll see if I can get the senior Science mistress to show you round. She can explain everything much better than I can."

She took up the telephone and said: "Miss Halliwell, please . . . Oh, Miss Wrent speaking. Are you busy? Oh, that doesn't matter, does it? Oh no, I should leave that—I want you to show a visitor round the New Science Building. Dr. Thompson—Yes, it's Dr. Thompson who's lecturing to-night—Oh, never mind, borrow a pair from one of the girls!"

"If only I'd had the courage to ask for the notes," Miss Thompson thought. "Too late now. I wish they wouldn't call me 'Doctor.'"

"I'm afraid I'm being a lot of trouble," she said.

"No trouble at all!" (What, after all, was the Science mistress for? and why didn't she hurry?)

Miss Halliwell was actually in the room, panting visibly, within four minutes. She was a pale, spotty girl of twenty-two, with an untidy bob and pince-nez. Miss Lesage, by almost ferocious politeness, always kept her at a distance. Miss Wrent disliked her, but knew which were the right degrees for a scientist.

"Miss Halliwell will be able to explain everything," Miss Wrent said, in unmistakable valediction.

"There are two ways of going," Miss Halliwell said, when the door was closed. Her voice was quiet, but without particular refinement and devoid of tone. "Either along the terrace, or upstairs through the dormitory passages. One way you get wet, and the other way's about five miles. Which would you rather?"

It was a desperate dilemma. Miss Thompson chose the five miles.

"All right," Miss Halliwell said wearily.

Miss Thompson, unaware that this was her usual voice, was much fluttered.

"I hope I'm not causing you a great deal of trouble."

"Oh no, no trouble."

They went along a passage, up a double flight of stairs, along a passage adorned on both sides with hockey-group after hockey-group, through a door, along another passage, down three steps, along another passage. "It's a twisty road—the road back," Miss Thompson thought; but her legs were responding gamely, and there couldn't be many more passages. At last they descended again to ground-level; through a door, fifty yards through

the rain, and into another building; along a passage, and up another flight of stairs.

At the top Miss Halliwell paused.

"Where were you?" she asked.

"Er—where was I?" Miss Thompson had not lagged more than two yards behind all the way.

"I was at Bristol and then Girton."

"Oh."

"Were you at Oxford?"

"Oxford? Oh, I see! No. No, I was never at a university."

"Oh," said Miss Halliwell.

"No, I haven't a degree really. It was just that a professor at Sheffield wanted to know about a disease that you only find in certain parts of Africa, and São Maharo, where I was, and I told him about the symptoms and what you have to do and so on, and they made me a doctor. It was a sort of joke, really."

"Oh," said Miss Halliwell. She did not go in for jokes. She opened a door, newly and beautifully made from Australian teak, and said: "This is the bio. lab."

"Oh yes." Miss Thompson was glad that she had made things clear about the ridiculous 'Doctor.' It was Miss Green's fault—of course the dear thing always thought it was a nice compliment.

The long room was empty but for one girl, who was standing in a corner gazing intently at a retort. The long benches had been carefully scrubbed, and minor pieces of apparatus stowed away; everything was clean and cold and tidy.

"The girls can take first M.B. before going up, now," Miss Halliwell explained.

"Oh, can they?"

Miss Thompson gazed at a row of jars. If only there was one labelled H_2SO_4 she would be able to show that she was not without education. Miss Halliwell moved towards her first exhibit.

"This is the G. and M. Universal Spectrophotometer."

"Oh yes."

"These are chainomatic balances."

"Oh, I see."

Miss Thompson gazed hard at the chainomatic balances. Miss Halliwell courteously gave her full time to absorb their features, before moving on.

"This is another chainomatic balance," she said.

"Oh, you have several?"

"Yes, three."

The girl in the corner poured half a test-tube full of colourless liquid into a beaker containing cold water, and produced an angry hiss. Miss Thompson, expecting an explosion, followed her guide gratefully into the next room.

"This," said Miss Halliwell gloomily, "is the Van Slyke manometric gas apparatus. It's rather an up-to-date type—the Bale-Stoney."

"What does it do?"

"Oh, we use it chiefly for microanalysis of blood."

"Oh, I see. What did you say this room was?"

"Just another part of the bio."

"I see."

"Of course, we don't touch bio-chemistry."

"No?"

"No," said Miss Halliwell.

They walked down slowly between the benches.

"I expect you've seen a Rehwald micro-burette?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Oh. This is one."

"Oh yes."

"We're rather proud of this," Miss Halliwell said without enthusiasm, "not many schools have them."

"What is it?"

"It's a Lovibond Tintometer."

"Oh yes."

"Would you like to see the new lecture-room?"

"I would, very much."

Miss Halliwell led the way up a few stairs, opened another door, and stood aside for Miss Thompson to see in. It was a schoolroom, with the desks banked up; at the bottom, a bench with retort-stands, taps, basins, and bunsen-burners.

"Oh, is this the lecture-room?"

Miss Halliwell admitted that it was the lecture-room, and after the regulation interval led a retreat. "Is there anything more?" Miss Thompson wondered. "I must show appreciation somehow, it's so good of her to take all this trouble. Oh, we've got back to the same room, so we must have seen everything."

"This is the senior physics lab.," Miss Halliwell said remorselessly.

(Oh, then it wasn't the same room! But it looked exactly the same.)

"This is a thermohydrograph."

Miss Thompson examined the thermohydrograph carefully.

"It's rather like the—the thing we saw in the other room," she suggested.

"Oh, do you think so?" Miss Halliwell asked with cold politeness.

"Well, just a little bit."

"Oh." Miss Halliwell moved on. "This is rather interesting—autographic Atwood machine."

"Yes, very interesting."

"Of course, physics isn't my line. I only teach it to the lower forms."

"Oh. Do all the girls study chemistry?"

"Well, most of the ones on the modern side."

"Do you find teaching interesting?"

"No, not very."

"That's a pity."

"Yes."

"I should think that chemistry's a very interesting subject."

"I believe it is. I haven't done very much myself—at least, not straight chemistry."

"What——" Miss Thompson began. She was interrupted by the bell, which for forty seconds made speech impossible.

"That's first bell," Miss Halliwell said. "I'm afraid I shall have to go and change. There isn't much time."

"Oh, certainly, I quite see."

They went downstairs, and Miss Halliwell waylaid a small girl.

"If you don't mind I'll get this girl to take you back to the private side."

"Oh, certainly. Thank you so much for showing me the laboratories. It was most interesting."

"Oh, not at all. Betty, will you show this lady the way to the private side?"

"Good-bye!" said Miss Thompson, and shook Miss Halliwell's hand.

"Oh—good-bye!"

"I'm afraid I can't take you the upstairs way," said Betty, "as I'm not allowed upstairs without leave in the daytime. But it's not raining so hard now. The new labs. are rather choice, aren't they? Doesn't that bell make an awful row? Nearly all the staff want synchronized bells put in, but the—but Miss Wrent won't hear of it, because the bell always reminds her of the good old days. You see, Dame Louisa had the bell put up to celebrate her twenty-first birthday as Principal, they'd had a hand-bell before, so it's a sort of sacred institution. I hope you're not getting wet. Would you like me to try and borrow an umbrella? Oh, all right. I don't think Miss Lesage likes the bell, either, but you don't hear it so much on the private side. Oh no, it doesn't matter about me, you see, you get very hard at school. It's a very healthy place, this, you know. Did you ever play hockey? Well, I always think lacrosse is better. I played hockey my first term. They always make the new girls play hockey. This is my second term, so I can do what I like. This way! Shall I go first?"

Girls passed them in every direction, some running. They glanced towards the old lady and her plump little escort, but were too polite or too much in a hurry to stare. They made their way purposefully—the mazy passages, the confusing topography of the place was easy to them. Betty, just as self-confident, had still the grace to be patently proud of her knowledge, proud, also, of the commission with which she had been entrusted.

"I expect you know," she said, "that the College dates back to the middle of the last century."

"Oh, does it?"

Miss Thompson did not know. She knew nothing. She was the one foreigner in a city crammed with natives, the one fool in a world of philosophers, led by a little child. And in half an hour—it couldn't be much more——

"Here we are," said Betty triumphantly, opening the baize-covered door which divided rich carpet from polished oilcloth. "I'm not allowed any further except on summons. I expect you'll find Miss Wrent. Good-bye!"

She gave her a wide, friendly smile, the most delicious thing that Miss Thompson had seen that day, and disappeared.

Alone in the passage, Miss Thompson heard no sound but the clucking of some clock—perhaps the one she had listened to before. It was the passage along which she had followed the maid. Or was it the other passage, which she had gone along with Miss Wrent? The curtain at the end might be the entrance to the hall; or the hall might be somewhere quite different, somewhere away to the right. Someone would come along presently—a maid or someone. It seemed rather foolish to be found standing in a passage; but there was nothing else to do—the doors might lead into private rooms. There was no sign of a bell. It was rather foolish of that friendly little girl to have left her, in mid-air, so to speak, but perhaps she was in a hurry to change or something.

To change. Yes, Miss Halliwell had said something about changing. Perhaps they all changed before supper. That would make her look rather odd, in the dress she had travelled in. It didn't

matter, really—it was no use trying to be like these people—but it might seem rather rude. They wouldn't all know that she had come in a hurry, without time to get her things.

The baize-covered door swung open and a girl entered the passage, a good-looking girl with rather broad shoulders. She passed by quickly, with an "Excuse me!", flicked the curtain aside and disappeared. Miss Thompson noticed that she limped a little, though the limp was disguised; she noticed, too, that the girl's lips were held close together.

The girl would probably come back, and she could ask her how to find Miss Wrent (or should she ask for Miss Lesage?—no, Miss Wrent). "I hope she won't look so determined this time. I didn't like to stop her when she went by just now." If the girl didn't come back, she would have to do something, to knock at one of the doors, or call out. Her legs were nearly done for—they had borne the work surprisingly well until now, but she couldn't stand much longer; especially as she might have to lecture standing up. Still, she would feel much better after a meal, especially if there was something hot to drink. A hot drink always made her head better, and seemed to make her legs less stiff. Of course, hot lemonade was the best thing, but she couldn't very well ask for that. There was no sign of a giddy-fit coming, anyway. A few aches and pains didn't matter, as long as she didn't have a giddy-fit in the middle of the lecture.

She heard the strong, slightly broken step, and a moment later the girl came through the curtain. The girl looked just as determined as before, her

lips close-pressed as though holding back a cry. But approaching Miss Thompson she hesitated and stopped.

"Excuse me, are you looking for anyone?" The voice was polite in tone, a little hard and loud.

"Well, yes; I was looking for Miss Wrent."

"I'll show you."

The girl led her through the curtain, and immediately on the left was a flight of stairs.

"It's that door at the top. Shall I take you up?"

"Oh, thank you, please don't trouble. I'll go up myself."

"Oh, all right."

The girl turned, and as she did so Miss Thompson saw her face, for an instant, in profile. A rather masculine face, except for something in the eyes. "Perhaps she's a mistress—she looks so grown-up," Miss Thompson thought. The girl limped away.

"I thought you were lost," Miss Wrent said brightly. "I don't know why Miss Halliwell didn't bring you back herself. I'll take you to your room."

"She had to go and change," Miss Thompson explained. "Oh, that reminds me, I'm afraid I haven't anything to change into."

"That doesn't matter, doesn't matter a bit." Of course it would look rather odd, but she must try to make it easy for the poor old dear. "Dame Louisa sometimes didn't change," she said.

In her bedroom Miss Thompson found a fire burning. Her coat, which the maid had taken, was on a hanger in the wardrobe. The box containing the slides and the envelope with the notes had been unwrapped and stood at one end of the

dressing-table. A dressing-gown lay across the end of the bed, and something blue peeped from the fold of the bed-clothes. Someone had been very thoughtful. She was slightly aghast to find, on pulling the blue thing, that it was a man's sleeping-suit. "I suppose it was the only thing they could find," she thought. "I wonder who it belongs to?"

By the side of the bed stood two pairs of slippers, an indoor and a bedroom pair. Miss Thompson rather nervously took off her boots—it was a long operation nowadays—and tried on the indoor slippers. They were a bit small and terribly high in the heel, at least an inch; but the colour went with her dress, and they would add a touch of smartness. It was very nice of someone to have thought of lending her those. Of course, high heels were the fashion now.

She walked rather awkwardly to the built-in basin at the corner, and sponged her face, delighted with the novelty of hot and cold taps in a bedroom. The warm water was very refreshing, and finding a brush and comb all ready she tidied her hair. "Now I look quite a beauty," she said to herself.

There might be time just to glance at the notes. She took them out of the envelope, and sat down in a rocking-chair by the fire. But almost immediately, with its traditional importunity, the bell sounded.

She went to the door and opened it. She could hear other doors opening and shutting, but no one came into view. At least a minute had gone since the bell. She must really be courageous and do something this time. It was obviously no good standing and waiting. Miss Wrent would begin to

think her an old silly. Perhaps it would be best to go back to Miss Wrent's study, if she could find the way; but she had seen Miss Wrent going in the other direction. No, the thing to do was to ring. She had read in books that in rich houses you always rang the bell and a servant came. She hoped it wouldn't be a male servant. There was no sign of a bell-push, but she noticed a cord with a tassel hanging over the head of the bed. She pulled it sharply and found herself in darkness.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

"Are you ready, Dr.—oh! has the light gone wrong?"

"No, I put it out by mistake."

"Won't it go on again?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how to."

"You just pull the cord again."

"Oh, I see!"

"Well, come along, you must be hungry."

"The Principal doesn't usually come in to dinner," Miss Wrent explained as they went downstairs, "she has to diet very carefully and she prefers to have her meals privately as a rule."

The school had assembled when they reached the dining-hall, and stood in silence. The prefects, at the far end, obeyed the rule by convention. The staff, standing near their places at the High Table, talked in low tones, their voices held down by the weight of silence in the hall.

The dining-hall had twice been extended by bad architects in the days before the fame of the school had brought the children of richer parents. The dividing lines had not been effectively hidden, and

it was very much too low in proportion to its length. Even now it was overcrowded, though an extra line of tables had been put in between the original four ranks and about a third of the school had their meals in one of the boarding-houses. "Of course, we badly need a new hall," Miss Lesage always remarked when rich fathers were entertained at High Table; but bequests were inclined to be earmarked for scholarships, for annual prizes rewarding good conduct, strength of character, popularity among companions, and other not easily assessed virtues, or for expensive ornaments in the College chapel; and the building fund, though it always rose impressively at the end of the financial year, was invariably reduced to its normal level by the need for new dormitories and class-rooms, new technical rooms and new studies. The walls of the hall were splendid with memories, but their enshrinement had followed the lead of the architecture, and the variety of style was almost beyond English artistic tradition. Winners of open scholarships since 1883 were shown on boards of different sizes made from different kinds of wood. On the opposite wall the Head Prefects since 1886 appeared on boards which differed as well from the scholarship boards as from each other. Above the High Table Dame Louisa, portrayed in her last years, glared ferociously at her College. The row of silver cups on the shelf beneath seemed to have been offered as libation to her spirit, a part of which remained in the buff distemper clothing all the wall that was not covered by boards or portraits. It was one of the oldest parts of the school, the High Table end of the hall, one of the first parts to be built when the collection

of pupils in the Manor, growing into a corporate personality, had demanded something essentially schoolish in the way of elbow-room; and though it had been created at so unfortunate a period it had a value; value not merely as a sentimental relic but as a living tradition, close, squat, unhygienic, middle-class, out-of-date. More potently than the portrait of the founder itself, it made the school aware, in its unreflective consciousness, that it sprang from hard stock. Only Miss Wrent remembered—and she faintly—the days when there had been just two tables, a mistress at either end of each, and when these tables had had to be pushed to the side, one on top of the other, for a concert. But the hall remembered more than she had forgotten, and it still gave Huntersfield, in spirit as well as in outward and visible sign, the rockiness that defied the expensive new paraphernalia and distinguished it from the crop of seaside 'educational hotels that came into being year by year and called themselves Public Schools for Girls. "The place may be as pious as a couple of convents put together," Mary Kennick had said while polishing the cups on the shelf, "but it is a school." She did not understand the elaborate texture of Huntersfield's piety, but she had articulated Huntersfield.

The slight shuffling stopped automatically, when Miss Wrent's head, an easy landmark with its broad *mèche blanche*, appeared in the doorway. Two hundred and fifty heads turned slightly, and five hundred eyes gave Miss Thompson her baptism of fire. Miss Wrent advanced quickly to the table, took the little silver hammer and rapped sharply. The two door-monitors swung the big centre doors

together. Miss Wrent rapped again. The head prefect said loudly: "Benedictus benedicat." Immediately there was a long rumble of chairs, and as it subsided high voices, mingling in a babel, swelled the tide of sound and carried it triumphantly forward. The low ceiling gave the noise no escape. The walls pressed it inwards. The jingle of spoons and glasses made a supplementary din to prevent the encroachment of one instant's silence.

Miss Wrent was introducing the guest, and Miss Thompson bowed in all directions, without hearing one of the names. Her eyes darted hither and thither. She should speak to someone, but she would only make herself heard by shouting, and would certainly miss the reply. Miss Wrent, giving instructions over her shoulder to a servant, offered no refuge. The long white tables stretching away to the end of the hall were bordered with faces which at every moment turned to glance inquisitively, and the thousand movements, syncopated like the drill of a recruit platoon, added visual to aural confusion. Finding a plate of soup in front of her, Miss Thompson seized a spoon—her sweet-spoon—and directed her attention to the business of eating. The soup was very hot.

"This is your first visit to Huntersfield, is it not?"

To her surprise Miss Thompson heard every word. Perhaps the lady opposite had a particularly strong voice. She looked as though she might have—a big, dark woman in the forties, exactly like a lawyer whose sex had been changed by a lightning artist with a few deft strokes. And it was certainly a very deep voice.

"Yes, it is."

Miss Pointward looked at Miss Thompson critically through her spectacles. An eye-glass would have taken its place better in her make-up.

"You'll find it's a very interesting old school. Quite different from any other girls' boarding-school."

"Oh yes?"

Miss Thompson was not sure if the lady could hear her; but her senses were recovering rapidly from the first onslaught of the noise, and it seemed now, instead of attacking at close quarters, to be banked up into a solid mass which was partly held back by a boundary line at the edge of the dais. She said, raising her voice:

"You have a very large number of girls."

("Good lord, the woman's deaf," Miss Pointward thought.)

"Oh, they're not all here, of course. Some of them have to mess in one of the boarding-houses."

"Miss Pointward is our senior classical mistress," Miss Wrent explained.

Miss Thompson was not sure whether this was an aside. She whispered: "Oh yes."

The woman on her right spoke suddenly.

"What part of Africa do you come from?"

Turning, Miss Thompson saw a lady who appeared to be an older edition of Miss Halliwell.

"Miss Grayworth, botany," Miss Wrent reminded her.

"It isn't exactly Africa—it's an island, São Maharo."

"Oh yes, that's just off the coast, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Miss Thompson simply, "about fourteen hundred miles off."

"Is it at all interesting botanically?"

"Botanically?"

"I mean," (with condescension) "I suppose you get a great many interesting plants and trees there?"

"Oh yes. A great number of trees, and some beautiful flowers. But I think I like the simple English flowers best."

"But what an opportunity!" Unlike Miss Halliwell, Miss Grayworth put her whole soul into conversation, thrusting her full weight of tone and grimace behind each sentence, pitilessly emphasizing nearly every word she used. "I would give anything for a chance to study tropical plant-life at first hand. Have you any photographs?"

"Of plants? No, I'm afraid I haven't."

"Oh, but what a pity!"

"I never have very much time when——"

Miss Pointward's baritone boomed across the table. "I expect you get some shooting?"

"Shooting? No, I don't shoot."

"I have a brother who used to be a missionary in Kenya——"

"Oh, have you?"

"—and he got some marvellous shooting out there. I forget what it was. Duck, I think he used to tell me."

"You mean he used to shoot himself?"

"No," said Miss Pointward pedantically, "he shot duck. As far as I could make out, he did practically nothing else."

"He was lucky to have so much time to spare," Miss Thompson ventured.

"Oh, well, he did his preaching on Sundays, you know. He couldn't preach all the week."

"Do you take pepper?" Miss Wrent asked.

§

"My dear," said Désirée Foster, "you know I'm not a snob, but then clothes are so frightfully cheap nowadays, I mean the ordinary sort of clothes a girl-typist wears, and they look so smart always."

"I don't think she'd look wight dweffed like a typift."

"Darling, I think you're trying to upset me, and I've had such a drastic day. You know perfectly well what I mean. She could at least have stuck on a little frilly white collar or something. Helen, darling, when you've finished with the sauce——"

"What always puzzles me," Pamela Brown ruminated, "is where they buy those things. I'm sure if you went into any shop in London, even somewhere like Golders Green, and asked for a dress like that they'd laugh at you."

"My dear, you don't realize," her neighbour explained, "in the days of our grandmothers they built things to last. That exclusive model was probably put together in 1905 and been going strong ever since."

"I do wish," said Winifred Host, further down the table, "that we could see her feet. Louise told me that she saw her going down the terrace, and she has the most marvellous South African field boots, made of patent leather and lacing up at both front and back."

"My dear, how staggering——"

"But of course you can only see them when she lifts up her petticoat to go over a puddle."

At the prefects' table Barbara was eating in silence, with gloomy concentration. She was in considerable pain. The obvious thing, of course, was to finish dinner as quickly as possible and then go to bed, but one couldn't do that after refusing a bed-leave to that little brat Mollie McStower.

"It is carnivorous," Mary Kennick remarked. "It has accepted the mouton brûlé au champ de chasseur."

"What has?"

"The female mish."

"Oh, I'd forgotten that she would be feeding on High."

Dropping her head an inch or two backwards, Barbara looked up the hall. For a moment she could only see Miss Wrent's face, but when Miss Pointward moved her head she caught a glimpse of an old lady with a pale brown face oddly set off by fine white hair. Her very thin body was fitted tightly into a simple dress of thick, dark-brown serge.

"She takes her food well," said Mary. Her view, from the other side of the table, was better.

"Yes. She looks more perky now. I saw her before dinner and she looked quite white underneath the tan."

"I'm afraid from appearance she's not a fully-fledged member of the intelligentsia."

"I think she looks rather charming. She's got nice eyes."

"Katherine dear, you'll be a prey to all the swindlers in the world if you go on being so charitable."

Katherine Paule laughed, as she did to answer every pleasantry, with her rich melodious laughter. Her friends did not dare to laugh so youthfully, but as Head Prefect she could do as she liked about laughing. (She was a very small girl, well under five feet in height, with dark hair and a rather childish face, and Huntersfield adored her; not particularly clever, indifferent at games; "Katherine has a personality like a brick coming through a sheet of plate-glass," Barbara said. It was true quantitatively. Mary Kennick's summary—"Maternal instinct prematurely developed"—was also somewhere near the truth.)

"Anyway, why should she be a member of the intelligentsia?"

"Well of course you don't expect that," Mary admitted. "But, joking apart, if these societies have got something important to say, why can't they send down someone level-headed to say it. They only make a bad impression by sending these woolly-witted females. The poor old thing's a saint, I've no doubt, but I know exactly what she's going to say and how she's going to say it, and it seems to me that I'm wasting my time listening to her. Don't you agree?" she asked Barbara.

"I don't know. I mean yes. All I know is that I'd rather stay in my comfortable bood and console myself with Lamartine than listen to any lecturer in that foul speech-hall."

"But I still can't see," said Katherine, "what the intelligentsia business has to do with it. You can't be terribly subtle on the subject of savage tribes and things."

"Not subtle, no, but original, or at least rational.

It always seems to me such an insult. Of course I don't claim to be one of the world's major thinkers, but when some absolutely bone-headed person, just because she can turn up texts in the book of Ezekiel quicker than I can, holds forth to me and pretends that she's teaching me something, well, I mean to say——"

As the hum of conversation subsided for a moment they heard Désirée's loud voice at the adjacent table.

"My dear I listened in through the keyhole, and it was absolutely staggering. Audrey was praying away twenty-five to the dozen: 'And we pray thee that our hearts may be made ready'—you know how Audrey's praying voice goes."

Mary frowned.

"I do wish Désirée would keep her voice under control. It's so bad for the kids."

"And I do wish," said Barbara (very softly, because Rosemary was only a few feet away), "that if Audrey must hold prayer-meetings she'd pray that the mishes be kept away. She couldn't do better if she wants to prevent religion becoming a complete flop in this place."

§

"Yes, but the question is, how many generations is it going to take to get the native mind up to the level of, say, a London elementary schoolchild's? Postulating that you'll ever get it there at all."

Miss Pointward fired the question at Miss Grayworth provocatively; with her ability for probing fundamentals and her inexhaustible patience she

could always triumph over Miss Grayworth ultimately. Miss Thompson, trying to listen to Miss Wrent's account of Huntersfield routine, heard the question with one ear. But the subject, started by leading questions addressed to her, had been borne away by the professional dialecticians.

"Well," said Miss Grayworth cautiously, "I was reading a book the other day by Aldous Huxley—"

"—You mean Julian Huxley."

"—Yes, I mean Julian Huxley, and he said that if you were to take a native of, say, Kenya, or Uganda——"

"But, of course," Miss Wrent said, "we never force religion on the girls. We try to surround them with sound teaching and good influence, and we find that religious aspirations come from the girls themselves. Girls are too intelligent nowadays to be spoon-fed; they just throw it back, if you'll excuse the metaphor."

"Will you take trifle or blanc-mange?" a maid whispered in Miss Thompson's ear.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, in vulgar language, they spit it out."

"Trifle or blanc-mange?"

"Oh, either will do, I don't mind, thank you— Yes, I see, you have to—to put the teaching just— just within their grasp."

"Well, it's not so much a case of putting——"

"But now suppose you took an English child and dumped her down, in the middle of, say, Tanganyika at the age of, say, three, and allowed her to be brought up by natives——"

Miss Pointward was bringing up her guns and placing them with cool strategy. Miss Grayworth,

preparing for a last effort to defend her position, racked her brains desperately. "Why," she asked mentally, "did that wretched missionary person get Pointward on to this subject? If it had been botany——"

Miss Halliwell, as she sat at the end of the table straining her ears, sympathized with Miss Grayworth. It would be too bad to see a fellow-scientist getting another beating from a woman who knew nothing except how to translate Latin and Greek, and who said that London University was as good as Oxford and Cambridge. Of course it was the missionary who had started the trouble by getting Pointward on to Africa. After being so stupid in the new labs. and making her late for dinner.

"I suppose," Miss Carry was thinking remotely in her spongy mind, "that it's because the missionary's not dressed that we were told to wear semi. I did rather want to show the school the blue satin I've got for the holidays. As it is, I don't really see why we had to change at all."

Perhaps it was end-of-term restlessness, because dinner on Saturday was usually brighter than on other days of the week; conversation at the High Table was usually freer and gayer; Miss Wrent reactively jovial, and even Miss Lesage—when she appeared—inclined to show off her pale, studied wit. Perhaps it was end-of-term, or perhaps it was this missionary. Strangers were sometimes very amusing; if they were not, they only served to stiffen formality. But the main grudge against this stranger was that she was going to spoil the evening. The staff was expected to show full numbers

for missionary lectures; it was part of the Huntersfield tradition. Miss Wrent never overlooked anyone's absence, and to miss twice made a difference when salaries were reviewed in July. If it had been an ordinary prep. evening a whole pile of essays could have been corrected and put out of the way; there would have been time to finish the new Arnold Bennett, to wash one's hair, to write a letter or two, to have a chat with Carry over Carry's admirable cocoa, to pop into the town and have a cocktail or see the last showing of "The Gunman." Instead, a hard chair, poor photographs badly projected on a slightly creased screen, and droning platitudes about remote and ineffectual activity in an unreal but too familiar world.

"However," Miss Jonnel whispered to her neighbour, "one must remember that the pay is good, as it goes for schoolma'ams, and if one signs the piety clause on the employment ticket——"

"Hush, Jonny! Miss Lenwick will hear you."

When Miss Wrent paused—she had warmed to her subject and gave no loophole until they were on their way to the drawing-room—Miss Thompson took the plunge.

"I wonder if I could have a few minutes by myself just to look over my notes. I've hardly had a chance—I can never read very well in the train——"

"But of course!" Miss Wrent was dismayed; she always fancied that she was a talented hostess as well as a born organizer. "You would be most comfortable in your own room, would you not? I can have your coffee sent up there. Oh no, Miss Lesage will quite understand."

The heavy curtains in the Visitors' Room shut

out sound as well as light. The close-fitting door was also covered by a curtain. In that room, with the fire burning hospitably and the lights cunningly shaded, it was hard to believe that the monstrous publicness of a school could be close by. When Miss Thompson rose from her knees she sat down in the little rocking-chair and sighed thankfully; thankful not for the warmth so much as for the silence and the loneliness. It was only a lull in the rising battle; she would be back again soon amidst the noise and the critical glances; but this was a blessed respite.

She took off the uncomfortable slippers and turned up the soles of her feet towards the fire. She was luxuriously warm now. The meal had been embarrassing, but it had done her good—her head was much better, and the faintness gone altogether. No warning signs of a giddy-fit. Thank God for that! Nothing but the slight, restless pain in her body and a feeling of great drowsiness. She had prayed with her eyes open for fear of falling asleep. If she let the heavy lids fall for just a few seconds she would be unconscious. She thought for one moment: "Why not?" Finding her asleep they would probably leave her alone till she woke. Miss Wrent seemed such a kind person, in spite of her quickness. It would mean no lecture. But did they really want a lecture? As she sat there, close to the cosy fire, the thought of the lecture, of standing up and speaking to all those alert-looking girls, seemed remote and fantastic. Surely she could not be transformed in a few moments from a quiet, elderly woman into a lecturer; into a person like that young lady in the train, talking confidently sentence after

sentence, never pausing for a word, strange and difficult philosophies pouring out mechanically, uninterrupted; or like Miss Wrent, knowing everything—which girl was temperamental, which girl had broken her leg at hockey, which girl always wanted to wear jewellery, which had parents in India. Fool into Solomon—a fairy-tale notion.

She took the notes out of the envelope. That would bring her to reality, and there was no time to lose. The notes covered four quarto pages in a very small, neat hand. The paragraphs were carefully spaced. Model notes, but too short; not enough bulk—not nearly enough—for an hour. It would have to be at least an hour, surely. She must ask Miss Wrent, if Miss Wrent stopped talking for a moment.

“Slide 1. Map of Africa. Comment on size, comparing with Europe.”

But how could you? Africa was compact in shape—Europe was so sprawly.

The maid tapped twice, very gently, before Miss Thompson heard. Oh dear! Time was up already!

“Come in!”

“Your coffee, madam. Shall I put it on the chair beside you?”

“Oh, yes, please! Thank you!”

As she stooped with a graceful movement the maid smiled, a friendly smile that careful training had failed to eradicate. It was the one who had let Miss Thompson in, and she had not been waiting at dinner. “A charming girl,” Miss Thompson thought. There were really some very nice people here; the little girl who had conducted her from the Science rooms, for instance. Perhaps there were ever so many more like that. People never looked

so friendly when you saw them all together. She would remember, while she was lecturing, that many of those who made up the frightening audience might be ever so friendly inside.

"Thank you very much! Are you going to be at my lecture?"

"Me, madam? Oh no, madam!" The maid added, at the door, "I hope it will be a success, madam."

"Oh, thank you very much!"

The door closed softly.

"Slide 14. Native method of sowing. Introduce story about mulatto boy and the chief's bullock. Cf. story in C.T."

What did "Cf." mean? She had known once, but had forgotten completely. Still, it didn't matter, as she didn't know the story about the mulatto boy. But so many of the notes were like this. Of course, poor Mr. Leveridge had never thought that someone else would have to use them, or he would have expanded them. You couldn't make up a story about a mulatto boy and the chief's bullock, even if there was time. In any case, the story had to fit in with the picture of the sowing.

She opened the box of slides, picked out number fourteen and held it up to the light. The picture was quite clear. The scene was rather like sowing in England, in the old-fashioned way; not a bit like the method they used in São Maharo. If only she had a picture of that! It was no good trying to describe it without the help of a picture.

For a moment she thought wildly of trying to find a way of escape. She could pretend to be ill, or she could say straight out that the notes she had

been given were not full enough. It would make her look silly, but not so silly as she would look trying to lecture. No, that was impossible. They had welcomed her, they had given her a good meal, lit a fire in her room. They expected her to do her part. Besides, she believed in her work, in Mr. Leveridge's work; it was the same, after all, in another field. If you believed in a thing with all your heart and mind and soul you ought to be able to tell people about it.

She dropped on her knees again, and when she rose a new determination filled her. What had she to do, after all, but to show the slides—to say what each one was as it appeared? And she could say something besides; she didn't quite know what it would be, but it would come, somehow. It must come. It was so important, the Work, that it must speak for itself, find itself words, even if they had to come out through the lips of a tongue-tied old Yorkshirewoman.

Yes, she was going back to the Work; only a soldier on short leave, not a retired veteran. She had said she would go back, and you couldn't break that sort of promise. They were waiting for her out there, trusting her to fulfil her word, with God looking down to see that she made no excuses. And this was trivial, this little obstacle on the road back. Just standing up in front of some girls for an hour and talking about the Work she believed in, the greatest work that God had ever given man to do. Not her work, that was only a tiny little part, but The Work. It was something so colossal that it made Huntersfield College a detail, an unimportant item in the great scheme of things. With this

inside her, so much bigger than herself, ready to burst forth somehow through her shaking lips, she herself was bigger than Huntersfield. She would show them, she would show God —no, you couldn't show God, he knew already—she would show Miss Green that she was not on the retired list. It was not a battle at all, it was a preliminary skirmish.

Something cold travelled up her spine, round her ears, right up over her head. A kind of excitement, but something more exciting than excitement. It had happened before, but never so powerfully as this. It made her body feel light and springy. The pain, the slight, dull, continuous, haunting pain, was still there. But it didn't matter; it had been made into something separate and external by those icy, exhilarating waves. The benison on the way to battle. You couldn't lose, after that.

Miss Wrent herself came to summon her.

"You'll want something round you going outside," she said. "I've brought this for you. It's stopped raining now, but it's still rather cold."

Miss Thompson accepted the wrap gratefully and when they reached the open terrace put it round her shoulders.

"We're very proud of the Speech Hall," Miss Wrent said, "it was only opened two years ago. The old girls subscribed for it. It was designed by Sir Harold Westaph. The roof is an exact copy of one of the Oxford Colleges. All English timber. There's room for the whole school in the body of the hall and three hundred visitors in the gallery. I don't think any other school has got anything quite like it. For Speech Day it's all decorated . . ."

Miss Thompson encouraged her with a "Yes!

... Oh, yes?" but none of it was reaching her mind. Her mind was empty of thought, full of emotion. The sky was clear in patches now and a few stars, blinking through the fresh, wet air, were in harmony with cool exhilaration. She walked, for the first time that day, without feeling her legs, hardly conscious even of the tight, awkward shoes; along the lower terrace, up four steps, along the upper terrace, through Small Court into New Court, across to the open door which let a broad streak of white fall across the dark flags.

Miss Lesage, with an ermine wrap round her shoulders, was waiting in a little ante-room halfway down the passage. She smiled encouragingly.

"So chilly, isn't it? I'm so sorry you had to come through the cold. It's the disadvantage of this school, it was built in bits, you know. I think you've met Miss Grayworth. Miss Grayworth is going to do the lantern."

Miss Grayworth took the slides.

"They are in order?" she asked.

"Oh yes."

"You'll see a little button on the reading-desk; if you'll just press that when you want the next slide."

There was something a little sinister in her master-of-ceremonies voice. It was like the surgeon's: "Now you'll tell me when I hurt you."

"I see," Miss Thompson said.

Miss Grayworth went away with the slides.

"We had better give her time just to get to the box," Miss Lesage said.

They stood in a triangle, Miss Wrent with her feet slightly apart, Miss Lesage resting with one

hand on the back of a chair, one knee slightly raised, Miss Thompson with both knees bent a little.

"I hope you'll admire the hall," Miss Lesage said. "We're rather proud of it."

"Oh, I'm sure I shall."

"Well, I think we can go now."

Miss Lesage led the way, Miss Thompson followed, Miss Wrent brought up the rear. At the top of four steps a door opened, swung importantly by a very small girl, and at once, from the vastness beyond, came the rattle of organized clapping.

The screen was at the back of the platform, which was empty but for two chairs and a reading-desk at one side. Miss Lesage crossed the platform—it was a wonder, the dignity of her walk with the eyes of the school upon her—and sat down on the further chair. Miss Wrent had descended into the hall and taken her place with the rest of the staff in the foremost occupied row of chairs. Miss Thompson stood near the second chair until Miss Lesage motioned her to sit down. The school went on clapping.

Miss Thompson looked round for Miss Wrent. She had disappeared. "But surely she followed . . . up?" she thought. Then slowly, she raised her eyes to see the audience. Half the lights were out already, and the girls, in even ranks unrelieved by the brightness of table-cloths and glass and silver, were a pattern instead of a human picture; a line of brown, a line of white, a line of dull colour; behind, a line of white, a line of brown. An inanimate pattern, fitted with jiggling hands, passive, to be lectured at. Perhaps it would be easier if the pattern were not so unresisting.

The clapping went on for a quarter of a minute, and then a loud "Hush!" came from the rear and it stopped with uncanny suddenness. Miss Lesage rose.

"Ladies," she began.

(Miss Wrent forgave her much for that "Ladies"; just as Dame Louisa had always said it, just as no other headmistress would think of beginning.)

"As you know, Mr. Leveridge, whom we had the pleasure of hearing once before, was to have lectured to us to-night. Mr. Leveridge, I am sorry to say, was unable at the last moment to come, but we have been very fortunate in finding a rescuer." ("Oh my God!" Mary Kennick whispered to Barbara.) "Dr. Thompson, of the Edith Warrener Women's Missionary Society——" The school gave a bark of applause, and Miss Lesage glanced at the slip of paper in her hand. "——has very nobly stepped into the breach." The school applauded. "Dr. Thompson is going to show us Mr. Leveridge's slides and to tell us something about the scenes they depict, scenes which she herself knows very well. Dr. Thompson, as many of you must know, has worked for many years in——" (she glanced down) "——in San Marago, an island in——an island where Christianity is being established bit by bit by splendid missionary labour. I won't waste any more of Dr. Thompson's time—I know you are all anxious to hear what she has to tell us—and I know you will join with me in thanking her for having come to us at such short notice. I will ask Dr. Thompson to begin her lecture."

The school clapped for the regulation five seconds. Miss Lesage gave her smile and stepped down from the platform. Miss Thompson stood up.

Terror had filled her for a moment, and passing away had left her trembling. She could see her hand shaking and found that her lips would not answer to control. It was ridiculous—she was not really frightened, only her body was frightened. Perhaps they could not see the trembling, down there in the hall. The mistresses in the front would see, but surely not the girls at the back; and the mistresses, with all their experience, would know how it was with your hands and legs when you were going to make a speech. The clapping had stopped. She must say something now.

The sensation of unreality had come again. Miss Lesage could not have meant her, not the person she knew inside, when she had kept on talking about "Dr. Thompson." It was she, of course, but a special she, a person whose part she was playing. She must start now. How ought you to begin? Miss Lesage had begun, "Ladies." That must be the proper way.

"Ladies!" She heard not her own voice but Dr. Thompson's. "I am very glad to be able to talk to you to-night."

Was she glad? Yes, it was part of her Work, the greatest work in the world. It was a stage on the journey back. She had had that feeling, sitting in the bedroom, the exciting, triumphant feeling, that she was going to win, and that meant that everything was all right. It was all arranged; everything must come right, if only she made an effort, made herself respond with all her might, all her fierce strength, to the inspiration that was ready. "Oh God!" she prayed. It would be all right.

She had prepared a second sentence, but it had

gone from her. She would have to talk about the slides, straight away. She glanced towards the screen, but no slide had appeared. Oh yes, the lantern lady had told her to press a button. She found the button and pressed it. All the lights went out, leaving her alone in a cave, and then a bright beam shot on to the screen, behind her. She looked at the notes, lighted by a tiny electric lamp. The lecture was beginning now. It would be over in an hour; one hour, and so many had passed that day.

"This," Miss Thompson said, "is a map of Africa."

§

Barbara pushed her chair back a little way and shifted the cushion. Passing through three generations of owners, variously used as a kettle-holder and a missile, the cushion was disastrously lumpy; only with skill and perseverance could it be arranged to give any comfort. The chairs in the Speech Hall were smooth, with sharp edges at the front of the seat rising a little to catch the thighs. "The sort of girl who would go to sleep on a Speech Hall chair" was Huntersfield's standard aphorism for its lazy members. If you were short you could put your feet on the rung underneath the chair in front; taller girls, aspiring to this comfort, had to swing back to clear their legs from the sharp under-edge, and the practice was not encouraged. Wriggling to get a better position, Barbara caught sight of the screen.

The photograph showed five Africans with huge stomachs, squatted in a circle, awkward and rather nervous of the camera. Barbara had seen the

picture a dozen times before. "Do they never get any further?" she wondered. The bright light was disturbing and she closed her eyes.

Mary whispered: "Last lecture this term!"

"Yes, and how many next?"

"Oh, hardly any—summer term."

"Thank heaven!"

"Do you feel any better?"

"No, how far have we got?"

"I should think about twenty minutes."

"Oh lord! is that all?"

No, very few lectures in the summer; that was something. But it was pretty awful to think of another term. Every one was longer than the last. One ought to leave school at sixteen, it was unbearable after that.

"Do you see Ethel Maine?" Mary asked.

"Don't whisper so loudly, darling. The Wrent will hear you."

"All right, but do you see?"

"No, I've got my eyes shut. Every time I open them I see nothing but those ghastly natives."

"She's eating something out of a bag."

"I don't wonder, after that foul dinner. She's eating something at her."

"I should only miss."

"You must try, darling. Must maintain discipline."

But when you did leave, what happened then? There were supposed to be careers for women nowadays; that meant learning how to use a typewriter, and then using it, and then going on using it. Of course most of these females at Huntersfield wanted to get married. They seldom said so, but

that was obviously what they really wanted. It was natural, of course, natural and instinctive; the desire to bring up a family and be looked after by something that smelt slightly whiskyish. She felt like that herself sometimes; but so stultifying, just to accept the common lot of women through the ages; to take on a job that was arduous and difficult and boring and never got you anywhere. Perhaps marriage saved you from becoming a futile old squeaker, like the poor wretch up there on the platform.

"She's finished," Mary whispered.

"No, I'm afraid it's only a pause."

"No, I mean Ethel's finished her chocolates."

"Oh, blast Ethel!"

What was the name of that person whose lecture was quite interesting? Oh, yes, Hay, Miss Hay. She was a person who got somewhere. She did a job that was worth doing and did it like a man. Yes, that was the whole point, when you wanted to talk about putting all your guts into a job you still had to say "doing it like a man." That was the result of this incurable feminine habit of getting married. Would it be possible to get hold of Miss Hay and ask her advice? A bit of a windbag, of course.

"And here you see Mr. Leveridge himself, talking to a native chieftain."

"That woman's voice will drive me cracked," Barbara said.

"Her voice," said Mary, "is, in comparison with her intelligence, alpha double plus."

"Poor old thing!" said Barbara.

The juniors in front were beginning to whisper above the regulation pitch, and someone was

audibly laughing. Discreet hushes were relayed down the hall. Gaines, the new handyman, had made a mess of the stoking, and the hall was becoming very cold. Tired girls shivered and moved closer to each other. Perhaps if the lecture went on long enough evening prayers would be cancelled and they would be allowed to go straight to bed. There would be trouble if you went to sleep and snored, and whenever you opened your eyes the beam led them remorselessly to that glaring sheet. The same slide had been up for about five minutes now. The chairs were becoming harder, the hall colder and colder.

§

Perhaps an hour had gone. It must be at least forty-five minutes. An hour, surely, would be enough.

Miss Thompson had forgotten to ask how long the lecture should last and she had failed to notice the time when she started. The little clock on the reading-desk now showed twenty minutes to ten. That must be somewhere near the younger girls' bedtime. The lecture had gone well. The slides had lasted out much longer than she had expected; you thought of saying something, and it took much longer to say than you expected. The slides were exhausted now. She had done her best for Mr. Leveridge, given him fair measure according to her power, and now she could say something about her own work.

It was more difficult, she found to her surprise, to talk about São Maharo than about Mr. Leveridge's slides. There was so much, and she knew it so well, that she did not know where to begin.

When she described her work she found it was dull. Interesting to her, because she knew all about it, but dull when she described it. This was the most humiliating experience of all. Trying to make a story out of unknown material she had succeeded beyond her expectations against tremendous odds. Now, with a deep knowledge of the subject and a fierce faith in its importance, she found herself altogether lacking in the means to exploit it. Her lips were a narrow gateway hindering the exodus of the struggling crowd of thoughts within. She was thinking of desperate need and describing the commonplace.

She began to realize, gradually, that she was striving no longer to last out time but rather to find it. The lecture had been long enough—her legs alone, stiff and aching, would have told her. The words she was saying now were not to fill in the minutes, only to postpone the end while she tried to collect her spirit and force it towards utterance. The ordeal was really over, and a new ordeal, greater and only realized by degrees, faced her appallingly. Waiting for her out there, thousands of miles away, dark lovable people who could not find their way alone. Sitting in front of her, three hundred, perhaps four hundred people, young and unbroken. Herself the only link. No one would stop her; she could say what she liked. Yet she talked of quaint customs, strange dress, things that would be interesting to girls, things that did not matter more than the old drab clothes she herself was wearing.

Was there anything that would express—it, what she wanted to express? She could tell them some-

thing of the darker side; but how unreal it would be. How could they, in that world of laughter and companionship, realize the dark things that were deep in the minds of another race? She could only tell them some of the things that happened—and they were things that must not be told.

She glanced at the clock. Another six minutes had gone. And suddenly she made up her mind.

Miss Wrent and Miss Lesage would be shocked. It didn't matter. Human beings could not stand in the way of the fierceness inside her, fierceness grown stronger because her lips had so long repressed it. The younger girls would not understand. The elder ones ought not to hear; they were too young, too happy. But the tide would not be held back.

She told the story badly, hesitating, stumbling.

"The woman was very ill. A baby had just come and it was dead. Her husband had been drinking and he had beaten her. He had beaten her before—before the baby came. The baby was dead and she was very ill. He was still—he had been drinking more. He would have killed—killed anyone if he could. I had to twist his arm to—to make him more quiet, and we had to tie him up.

Three minutes later the lecture ended.

"I am sure that we have all been intensely interested in Dr. Thompson's lecture," Miss Lesage said. With the instinct born of long practice she had woken from her half-sleep at Miss Thompson's final word, even before Miss Wrent had gently touched her elbow. She went on, in the perfect voice which reached the far corners of the hall despite its softness: "To-morrow you will have the

opportunity to make some practical response to Dr. Thompson's appeal, and I only want to say now . . . greatly impressed . . . vivid description . . . great work . . . great need . . . the world to-day. As it is rather late, we shall just sing the Doxology. Breakfast to-morrow will be at a quarter to nine. Is Gwendolen Telpot there?"

The opening bars were struck on a piano in the gallery. Miss Thompson found that she had no voice to sing.

§

Rosemary Tellon and Audrey Salington walked slowly up the terrace arm-in-arm. As leading members of the Huntersfield Prayer Union they had, according to custom, been to thank the lecturer.

"I'm sure she's a good woman," Audrey said, "but I feel somehow that there was something lacking in the lecture."

"Yes," Rosemary answered. They went on for a few paces in silence, relishing their companionship, and then she said quietly: "I think it was the really deep spiritual note. She said a lot about Christianity, but she didn't say anything about Personal Communion. I think a missionary lecture should always be based upon that. It's such a pity when any lecturer loses the opportunity to turn the hearts of all those who have never known——"

"Yes, that was it. I think you're right."

Crossing the New Court on their way towards Mount House, they passed by another couple coming the other way, also arm-in-arm. It was too dark, at ten yards' distance, to recognize the faces,

but they knew the voice when Mary Kennick called briefly: "Good night!"

"Good night!" Audrey answered. There was meant to be something deep and womanly in her voice.

"How I loathe that sanctimonious little beast!" Barbara said, when they were separated by the length of the Court.

"Bad-tempered to-night, old darling?"

"Yes, I suppose I am. I'm sorry. I'm a bit tired. For conscience' sake I'll say that Rosemary is not so bad as Audrey."

"Neither of them can help it," said Mary, "it's born in them. It's a disease."

"I suppose so."

"Well, we'd better go up. Good night, m'dear."

"Good night—oh, I say, do you think that that story about the stillborn kid and the drunken chieftain was true?"

Mary stroked her chin.

"I wondered that," she said. "I suppose it must have been. She doesn't look like a liar."

"No, she looks anything but. But she might have imagined it."

"I doubt it."

"I'm glad you think that."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Well, good night."

"Good night."

§

The fire was still glowing, and Miss Thompson stood in front of it to undress. She undressed very slowly, more slowly than usual, as her hands

were fumbling and disobedient. As she put on the man's sleeping-suit she longed for her own woollen nightgown, but it was cosy in this room, with the thick hearthrug and the glowing fire. The luxury of it no longer scared her—nothing could scare her now that the lecture was over. And strangely, she wished that she could give the lecture again. Now that she knew that there were enough words inside her she could do so much better. She had done miserably, but it was over. Nothing to do now but to make preparation for going back; that would not be so difficult as giving a lecture.

A Bible had been provided. She read the twenty-third psalm, her lips forming the words though her eyes were too tired to see them; knelt for a few minutes, and then carefully laid her tired body on the bed. She put out the light.

The fire, rising to a little brightness as a piece of fresh coal tumbled to the red base, showed the furniture of the room indistinctly; sharper for a moment, then dark again, sombre masses with new, uncertain shapes against panels of rose. Ghostly, rather agitating. Miss Thompson closed her eyes and moved round, first shoulder, then hips, then drawing back the arm, on to one side. The cool pillow came against her face. It was very soothing. A blessed tiredness seemed to make her limbs fall into the most comfortable position.

Her head was aching again. There was a little bottle of aspirins in the pocket of her coat, but it was not worth getting up to fetch it. She could not get up; the blankets seemed to be holding her body down, gently but very firmly. She would be asleep soon, and the headache would be gone in the

morning. Perhaps it was not really a headache at all, only the thoughts, vague restless thoughts, that pushed each other about so roughly that she could feel the weight of them in her forehead.

The bright dusty beam, converging to a brilliant point, was still in front of her eyes, but it grew fainter and gave way to other shapes. Shapes and faces. Faces of ladies. Miss Hay's face, distorted and indistinct, saying words which she could not hear. The face of Miss Saule, and Miss Green's face, or Miss Wrent's. It was both at the same time. Then the faces became confused, and she saw them in a long line, like one extended face, all looking in one direction, first at her, then away from her, towards a girl who was limping.

Her heart jumped suddenly, and she opened her eyes, but the heavy lids instantly fell again. Her thoughts were uneasy, she wanted to shape them but they flickered evasively, and vanished, leaving a sense of omission. There was something she wanted to remember, something gone by that she should have caught up. She prayed: "Oh God, forgive me for having done so badly." The image of the dining-hall, white table-cloths and faces, was fading away. She saw again the girl limping; and then, much more clearly than she could see it in the daytime, she saw Elsa's face. "I'm coming," she said, sweetly and fiercely. The other faces, still grimacing, were drawing back into the darkness.

§

Miss Wrent opened the door of Tennyson and peeped inside. Without putting on the light she

knew instinctively, or perhaps could see by the faint glimmer of light that came across from the windows of the private side, that all the cubicle-curtains were closed.

"Good night, Barbara," she whispered.

"Good night, Miss Wrent."

"Good night, girls."

"Good night, Miss Wrent."

Dame Louisa had always made this final tour of inspection, and since Miss Lesage thought it unnecessary Miss Wrent had to do it herself. She closed the door softly, and went on to Landor.

In Tennyson the heavy breathing stopped, curtains were opened a little for sociability's sake, and the whispered conversation started again. Barbara did not interfere. It was past her usual time for saying: "Well, we'd better go to sleep, good night everybody!" but on the last Saturday it was bad form to throw one's weight about, and conversation could go on a bit longer if it did not get too loud. They were all rather restless and talk would be the best thing to make them sleepy.

She herself could neither talk nor sleep. Her leg was painful, she could not get comfortable, and she felt slightly sick. She had forgotten about the game, but now, when she closed her eyes, it came back to her in kaleidoscopic pictures of girls running, sticks waving and crossing and turning. She seemed to be running, running without stopping down an endless field towards an invisible goal, the bad leg spoiling her run and the ball nowhere. Phoebe Belmont was indulging in a long monologue, and though her bed was furthest away Barbara could hear every word. "And now, girls,

this is a chucha-chucha. In Yuhuhuha people don't go about in motor-cars. They go about in chucha-chuchas. If you were to go to Yuhuhuha . . .” Phoebe's whisper was particularly irritating, so quiet that it could not be classified as a breach of the peace, but so insistent that you could not close your ears to it. The imitation was remarkably faithful. Even in that husky undertone she caught and caricatured the fatuity of an old maid's speech, caught even the touch of North Country which occasionally coloured Miss Thompson's vowels. If she had felt better Barbara would have enjoyed the performance. As it was—well, she had been rather down on Phoebe several times this term, and the kid's parents were in Canada, which was bad luck.

It was a good job the poor old thing couldn't hear. Where would she be now? Probably talking to the Lesage in the drawing-room; or possibly in bed. It was hard, somehow, to think of her in bed. That sort of person always seemed inseparable from the daytime clothes you saw her wearing. Impossible to visualize her without that dowdy brown dress. But of course she must undress, like anyone else; and surely she must wear something quite different out in that island, wherever it was. A frightfully hot place, probably.

Then imagination broke down altogether, too sparsely nourished by the glimpses which the lantern afforded. Photographs were so much more unreal than drawings. But it was not that. It was the droll contrast between place and person. One could roughly visualize the unknown scene. One could not force Miss Thompson into the picture. Yet she had been in it for—how many years had she said?

And she was going back. The natives could not get on without her, she had said, and she was going back. Back to naked savages who beat their wives an hour after childbirth. Rabelaisian fancy—going back!

The faint picture, strenuously conceived, became clearer as well as more fantastic when she fell asleep. The running girls and the sticks crossing and twisting had vanished altogether, leaving room for huts and queer trees and savages. The central figure grew large and dominant; not the old woman with her face under-lighted and shadowed by the reading-desk lamp, not the old woman standing in the passage in the dowdy brown dress, but the semblance of her in a gigantic frame.

When Barbara woke she had no idea how long she had slept. A few seconds, perhaps, or a couple of hours. Someone was still talking, loudly now, having heard authority snoring. Not Phoebe, but somebody else who had taken up the entertainment and was performing more crudely while Phoebe giggled. Yes, it was that little beast Nora.

Blast them! Why couldn't they go to sleep? If their legs were aching like hers—!

"Now girls, in Tutitut they don't have the same sort of food as we do. This is a picture of a funny plant they eat called the wah-wah. If you could only see all those poor heathen in all their sin and suffering . . ."

Barbarasat up and with a sharp movement flicked the curtain of her cubicle to one side. Suddenly enraged, she controlled her desire to shout and made her voice cold and smooth, quiet but fluttering a little.

"My God! If you little swine had got a tenth of that woman's guts you'd be some use in the world."

PART V

GENIUS OF WARFARE

MAJOR GASTELL mixed a new green and dabbed the parrot's breast delicately. Then he leaned back a little, closed one eye, and scratched his tight moustache with a cat's paw movement of the middle finger. A door slammed and he heard the thump of someone landing at the foot of the stairs. He called out: "Is that you, Barbara?"

She came into the studio laughing.

"How did you guess?"

Gastell took four brushes out of his mouth.

"Mrs. Toit usually comes down on her feet. Are you going out?"

"No, darling, I put on my outdoor things with a view to going to bed."

Gastell turned to look at her with one eye.

"Oh, are those outdoor things?"

"Yes, darling."

"They look expensive."

"They were, rather."

"I suppose it improves your skirt, sliding down the banisters?"

"I never come down any other way and none of my skirts have ever suffered."

"They do. They go shiny, I've noticed."

"Nonsense, darling."

"Turn round. Yes, there's a big shiny mark across the seat."

"Did you want me for anything, or was it just to tell me that I'm too old to slide down the banisters?"

"That was all. No, it wasn't. Did you remember to say anything to Mrs. Toit about the bacon?"

"No. I like the way she does it."

"All burnt?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't."

"Then *you* ought to say something."

"My dear, you know perfectly well that I can't say anything to Mrs. Toit."

"Coward!"

"Nothing of the sort. No decently brought-up man argues with a lady."

"Oh well, I suppose I shall have to."

"That's a good girl."

The parrot was really complete, just as perfect as a stage decoration had to be; but the brightness could be increased, and Gastell was tempted by the possibility. He scratched his moustache furiously and mixed a blue. Of course he was overweighting the thing, but there was something so fascinating about a parrot. He pricked at the wing cautiously.

Barbara stood staring at him, noting, as the sun fell on it, the increased greyness of his hair.

"I suppose you couldn't come out with me?"

"Sorry, old girl!" he spoke awkwardly, gagged with brushes. "Light's perfect this morning. Must get on while the going's good."

"You couldn't plead lack of inspiration?"

"It's not a case of inspiration."

"Oh, it's a bread-and-butter?"

"My dear girl, what do you think?"

"So sorry, darling. I really wasn't thinking."

But he was not appeased at once. Really it was a bad brick for Barbara; she ought to know better by this time. Swinging round, he opened his mouth suddenly, dropped all his brushes, and caught one or two as they fell.

"Is it a bread-and-butter picture?" he mimicked, scowling at her. "My dear beloved child, do you really think that I paint this sort of poppycock to gratify my æsthetic sensibilities? Do you for one minute imagine that I'm proud of this pretty-pretty stuff? Do you think that if I was a rich man I'd spend the best morning in the year working on a crack-jawed Christmas Almanack subject? Pull yourself together, my dear, for the lord's sake."

Barbara waited quietly for the storm to subside. She knew that, so long as she was not guilty of a genuine and serious lapse in taste, he enjoyed an occasional explosion of this sort. He was railing, not at her, but against the economic system that chained him.

"You're doing an awful lot of bread-and-butter these days," she said sympathetically.

Turning his eyes away from her he smiled a little grimly at the parrot.

"Well, your education isn't cheap, you know."

"I know. I'm sorry."

"Not your fault, m'dear! I brought you into the world—at least, I was partly responsible—and" (changing the brushes) "it's up to me to make the best of a bad job. You're not sitting on those sketches, are you? Oh, all right!"

"But when are you going to do some proper stuff again?"

"I don't know. Not yet." Something was worrying him, and he dabbed furtively. "That reminds me, I'm afraid I want you to sit again."

"Again? Oh lord!"

"Sorry!"

"Not nude, I trust. I simply won't sit nude until the weather's warmer."

"Nude? Oh no, on the contrary. In those things." With a jerk of his head he pointed to a green sports-jacket and a red tam-o'-shanter hanging on the end of a screen.

"In those things?" she asked, horrified.

"Mm."

"But, Dobbin, why ever?"

"Agreed by sub-committee."

"What sub-committee?"

Rather annoyed—he was out of the mood for conversation, with the light so good and the parrot taking up so much time—he turned round to explain.

"The Cennifide Club—have you heard of it? No, neither had I till a month ago, but it's the most important ladies' political club in London. I forget what party. They've opened new rooms, and they require a painting, five feet by four, to illustrate the Spirit of Youth. Yours truly is commissioned."

"But is a red tam-o'-shanter their idea of youth?"

"Apparently. I understand that a sub-committee was appointed and after five weeks' deliberation they decided two things, as hereunder. One, that the Spirit of Youth must wear a green sports-coat

and a red tam-o'-shanter. Two, that it must be interpreted in a non-modern style."

Barbara frowned.

"That just illustrates what I say about the ghastliness of being young. Until one is about forty one's considered to be a priori the sort of person who wears a green sports-coat and a red tam-o'-shanter. Have I got to carry a tennis-racket in one hand and a pair of skis in the other?"

"You will sit, then? That's a——"

"Well, I suppose there's no option. I'd rather go and serve drinks at the club bar, if they have one, but I suppose there's not quite the same profit."

"Fraid not. I shall make the tam-o'-shanter extremely red, and then I shall sting them a hell of a lot for my trouble."

"But it's such an undignified way of making money."

"I know it is. But it's better than working for the commercial studios, and in art, as you well know, there is no money at all. Art has to be practised either by very rich men or as a hobby. Well, I must get on with this damn thing. You'll sit, won't you?"

"I'll think it over," said Barbara.

She went out, but was back in ten minutes. This business, it was getting on her mind. It was time she took the plunge—better get it over.

"Hullo!" said Gastell. "Done your shopping?"

She ignored the pleasantry.

"I've decided, I will sit for you."

"Good!"

He expected her to go, but she stood at the door, hesitating.

"Are you pleased?" she asked at length. "I mean, are you in a good mood?"

"Yes, fairly, but exceedingly short of money."

"I say, Dobbin, I don't often interrupt you when you're working, do I? but——"

There was something uncertain in her tone, and Gastell, sensitive to variations in voices, turned round again. A pity to spoil a morning like this, but life was more important than riches. He took out his cigarettes, put one between his lips and threw another to his daughter.

"What is it? Been kissed in a taxi or something?"

"No. I want to leave Huntersfield."

"You mean—not go back?"

"Yes."

Gastell lit his cigarette and held the match, watching it, until it burnt his fingers.

"I see." Very deliberately he blew four smoke rings and watched them expand and melt into blue clouds. "Of course, most people find school a bit tedious in their last year. But—mm—you've only another term to go, you know."

"I know. Twelve weeks too long."

The weariness in her voice was so near to melodrama that he smiled, and she smiled back at him.

"Besides," he said, "I believe I have to give a term's notice, otherwise I have to pay up."

"The Wrent would let you off that if I wrote a letter to explain."

"Explain what?"

"Well—that I wanted to leave."

A dark suspicion entered Gastell's mind—one never knew where one was with Barbara.

"You're not intending to go to the Slade?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, seriously.

Early in life she had realized that it is better to send in too large a bill, as the customer will pay gladly when he has knocked you down a pound.

Gastell fumbled in his pocket, found a shilling, and threw it to her with a dramatic gesture.

"It's a good one, alas!" he said.

"Thanks." She picked it up. "But I was only ragging."

"Then why do you want to leave?"

"Well, I've grown out of the place, if you see what I mean."

"Yes, I do see. But can't you stick one more term? I thought you quite liked it. It's a decent sort of school, I always imagined. It ought to be for the money. Winifred says it's the best girls' school in the country."

"It is, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, I like the place, all except the gross party, and there are some awfully nice people there, and so on, but it's so small. It's rather hard to explain. I mean, you do such unimportant things. For the first three years I was quite happy sweating away to get the Fanstead Prize and win the Hundred Yards Under Sixteen and so forth, and I knew that I was going to get a lot of kudos when I did it, whatever it was, and that made me quite satisfied. But now I've got to realize how utterly unimportant it is to the rest of the world whether

I win the Hundred Yards or not. You see what I mean?"

"Yes. But then it's *equally unimportant* to the rest of the world whether I finish off the Rumanian Girl or do a foul Victorian picture of you in an ugly hat; except that the world will pay me for the latter and not for the former."

"Yes, but the Rumanian Girl is important for its own sake. The Hundred Yards isn't."

"Yes, I see what you mean."

"And you've no idea how intolerable females are in bulk. After eleven weeks——"

"My dear, I have. When I was a subaltern I did any amount of poodle-faking."

"But that isn't exactly the same thing——"

"——And the rows of women I've been meeting over this Spirit of Youth. Ancient and aristocratic women. Goggle-eyed women. Knock-kneed women. Masses of them."

"But you do get away from them occasionally. You're not with them all day and all night."

"All night? No, thank God!"

"Well, you see why I'm getting rather fed up with it. After three years and the best part of a fourth. Of course, I know it's beastly ungrateful of me after all you've had to shell out."

"No. I'm not thinking of that. The money—well, it's like paying for medicine, you don't pay for your child's pleasure, but for her welfare, which is always entirely different."

He said the last words half to himself. It was Gastell's habit to murmur, half aloud, the thoughts which ran on in his own mind when he had finished saying all that was necessary. He repeated, rumina-

tively: "No, it's not the money," and fell into silence. Barbara prepared herself. She had been waiting for an easy cue.

"Look here," Gastell said suddenly, quite quietly, not domineering. "You've got something up your sleeve. Better have it out, old thing."

She waited, recasting her opening sentence, and he helped her.

"You don't want to leave Huntersfield just because you're bored with it. You're not the sort that chucks a job before it's finished. You've got something else in your mind." He smiled affectionately, his rare, charming smile. "Come on, own up!"

"Yes, I have."

But she still felt her way uncertainly. It was not only the problem of muffling the blow for poor old Dobbin. There was another problem, more difficult and intangible, mixed up with it. Essentially, the problem of right and wrong. It would be easier to give Dobbin a shock if she were quite certain that the object was sound. But was it? Was she just sacrificing him for a whim of immaturity?

She asked, with deliberation: "Do you know anything about Christianity?"

He considered for a moment.

"Well, yes, I suppose I know something about it. I mean, I know the theory of it."

"Well, what I want to know is this: what does one have to be to be a Christian?"

"In what sense? I mean, in current phraseology a Christian means a civilized person."

"Yes, but what does it really mean?"

"Well, I suppose, a follower of Christ."

He did not want to shirk her questions, but he disliked the whole subject. He had disliked it still more since the death of his wife. Especially in conversation with Barbara.

"That's rather vague," she pursued.

"Well, I'm not really the person to ask. I mean, damn it, they were supposed to teach you all about that at Huntersfield. But I take it that a Christian has got to believe that Christ was divine, and he's got as far as he can to follow out the—the lines laid down in the New Testament."

"That's the best sermon I've ever heard," said Barbara.

"My dear, I think it's rather——"

"No, I mean it, honestly. I mean, you make it so simple. I've always suspected that that was what it all came to, but——"

"You mustn't take my word for it. I don't really know anything. You see—well, to tell the truth—of course, I don't usually talk about these things—but if you can understand me, I have the feeling that I've never quite forgiven God, if there is a God, for——"

He was stumbling hopelessly and she saved him. "Yes, I quite see that. Poor old Dobbin!" She waited a little before going on. "The odd thing is, that I think I am a Christian, according to your definition."

"Well—I'm very glad you are. I'm sure your mother——" He wanted to justify himself, to explain. "It's always easier for women," he could have said. "There's something in their mental make-up which makes Faith in things startlingly

easy as compared with a man's groping. A man never can trust himself outside the limits of his reason . . ." But he only said: "Your mother would have been very pleased," and smiled rather whimsically. "I should have said the same thing," he thought, "if she had announced her engagement to an unimpeachable and wealthy baronet."

Recalling the main stem of the discussion, he said with happy directness: "Well, what's it all got to do with leaving Huntersfield, anyway? Do you want to be a Sunday-School teacher or something?"

She smiled.

"Worse than that."

"Well, what?"

"We had a poor old thing down to lecture last Saturday. She was supposed to be giving a lecture that someone else should have given, about some part of Africa that she knew nothing about, and of course she spluttered and fumbled and made a complete mess of it. But towards the end she started to talk about her own work, and though she wasn't much better at that it rather sort of hit me in the stomach."

"Oh?"

His smile was only partly derisive, and she did not resent it.

"Well, ever since a rather horsey social-worker person came down—that was two or three terms ago—and talked about women doing something definite I've had the idea germinating that I was rather a useless sort of person. I mean, I've been in the world about eighteen years, and so far I haven't done a damn thing; I mean, to help anyone or create anything or—well, anything. Well, this

missionary person—Thompson her name is—she is doing something. And she's been doing it for about forty years."

"Doing what?" he interrupted.

"Being a missionary."

"Where?"

"A place called São Maharo."

"Where's that?—well, never mind."

"And the thing is that she's going on doing it, without any help. You can see she's not fit for it—she's a sort of shrivelled-up little thing—and yet she said quite definitely that she was going back—within a few weeks. She's the only white person on the island, at least, the only English one, and the natives can't get on without her." She stopped, uncertain how to make the next step. Then: "Well, one can't let her go alone."

"Can't one?"

"No. If you'd seen her you'd realize. And if you'd heard what she said—half the people on the island are murderers and—what's the word?—fornicators and that sort of thing. And it stands to——"

Again he cut her short. He was thinking very rapidly, as calmly as he could.

"But do you think you're the right person to help her? Don't fiddle with those brushes, there's a good girl."

"Well, I've been wondering that for some time. Of course I'm not a terribly religious sort of person. But all the religious people I know would be no earthly good if it came to building a house or anything like that. And it seems to me that if you're a Christian and have got any sort of intelligence you

ought to be able to—well, not to preach, but to tell the story of the Gospels and—the sort of person Christ was and the things he taught, and——”

“Ought you?”

“Well, yes, I think so.”

“You don’t think of the thing purely as an adventure?”

“No. There’s nothing so stupid as an objectless adventure. It’s an adventure to jump off the top of a bus, but it’s not worth doing.”

“No,” he said, “it isn’t.”

He had become grave and rather nervous. She went closer to him, took hold of one of his fingers and rubbed it. Neither liked demonstration, but she could not put it all into cool words.

Speaking with a slightly twisted voice, she said: “Of course, I hate the idea of leaving you.”

“So do I,” he said. But he added quickly: “Of course, I—wouldn’t think of that if I thought it was the—the right thing. I mean, the best thing.”

“You don’t think I’m the right sort of person to be a missionary?”

She was very sober, and there was a note of pleading in her voice.

“I can’t say anything about that.” He lit his cigarette for the third time. “The way it strikes me is—is it big enough? I mean, it’s a risky thing for a —well, if you don’t mind my using the phrase—a mere girl to go out to a place like that, and——”

“But she does it. I’m worth four of her, physically.”

“That’s true, but then she knows the ropes, which is everything in that sort of job. No, what I was going to say was, is it a big enough job?”

"I can't think of anything much bigger."

"No, I don't mean is it tough enough. I mean—is the object large enough? You know, you're rather a big person. It may be partly paternal pride of course, but I've met a good many women, as well as a good many men, and though I wouldn't tell you so in the ordinary way it's always seemed to me that you've got something in you which is going to make a hell of a loud noise when you get to work on a job. You see what I mean? You seem to me to be the sort of person who is going to shift things."

"Well, that probably is paternal pride. But if it was true, surely that's the sort of person you want on a job like this?"

On one side of his mouth he folded his lips together.

"I'm not sure. I don't usually go in for saying exactly what's wrong with the world, as the newspapers do, but I rather think that one of the troubles—in this country anyway—is that all the important things are being done by stupid little people while all the big people are tremendously occupied by—well, smaller things. Not unimportant things, but relatively unimportant. It's what's usually called quixoticism. Chucking yourself like blazes into something that's very noble but not really worth while. These things look worth while when you see them close to, but from a proper distance they're not. It's like painting. You're doing a landscape, and you get awfully keen about a cow in the mid-foreground and you make an absolutely perfect drawing of it and then when you step back a few paces you find that your atten-

tion's so fixed on the damn thing that you can't see the landscape. You see what I mean? Naturally this good person—Miss Thompson, is it?—naturally she thinks that to proselytize this place São Maharo is important; so it is, to some extent. But when you think of the vast unconverted masses in China, say, or in Africa—by the way, where is this place? I've heard the name, I think, but I don't know anything about it."

"I don't know very much myself."

"Where's the gazetteer?"

"In the dining-room. I'll get it."

"No," he thought, waiting for her. "It's quixotic. It's the trouble about this damned Irish blood. It will make men rush over the top when they'd win the whole war if they'd wait in the trenches for a bit and behave like sensible soldiers."

She came back turning over the pages of the gazetteer, and finding the place she read out—
" . . . and about ninety miles in breadth. Largely covered by forest. Native population, numbers not ascertained. Officially Portuguese. The climate is quite unfit for Europeans. For some years mining was carried on near the coast by a few Portuguese, who built a rough harbour, but this ceased in about 1912, and as far as is known all the miners left. Trading vessels call occasionally to barter kitchen utensils, implements, etc. for vegetable produce.' Doesn't tell you very much," she commented.

" 'Climate quite unfit for Europeans.' "

"Well, that's nonsense, of course. Dr. Thompson has been there for forty years."

"I should like to meet Dr. Thompson. Have you

thought of slum work? That's work that wants doing, God knows. Why, within a mile or two of this house there are people living in absolutely barbarous conditions, and it's nothing to the East End."

"Yes, but there are lots of people on to that."

"You know, I'm afraid you're a quixote."

"Well, aren't you? You're only really happy when you're painting something that only a dozen or so people can appreciate."

He hesitated.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Art, I'm afraid, is a quixotic business. But then no one has ever pretended that the artist is really sane."

"Isn't there something rather important in insanity?"

"Mm—yes. Provided that you're sane periodically. As you know well enough, I divide my time between being an artist and being a decorator."

She looked up at the Genius of Warfare, so that his eyes followed the direction of hers and rested, with hers, on the little card which said defiantly, "Rejected 1922."

"Isn't that important?" she asked, nodding at the soldier's strange, piercing eyes. "More important than anything else?"

"Yes," he said.

PART VI

DOORWAY

‘**D**EAR Miss Gastell,
“I am very sorry not to have replied to your most welcome letter before. We have been very busy in the last two or three days.

“Certainly I shall be delighted to give you an interview. If you could come to this office on Wednesday, next, at about eleven o’clock, I would make an effort to be free then. Will you let me know if this would suit you?

“In the meantime, I feel that I ought to say just one or two things about the work for which you are thinking of offering yourself. I expect you will have talked it over already with your parents. You will, however, forgive me if I add a little warning about the magnitude of the task which you would be setting yourself, and you will realize, I know, that I am not in any way trying to damp your enthusiasm for a Cause which I have so greatly at heart.

“In the first place, I need hardly ask if you are *absolutely convinced* that you are called and ready to devote your life to the service of the Master? (Matt. xx. 16.) Without that burning desire and wholehearted surrender there can be no Real Service. But I do not doubt that you have thought and prayed long and earnestly about this. Secondly, I expect you realize that the Field where Dr.

Thompson has laboured so long and so faithfully is not an easy one to conquer. It demands not only a robust constitution (the climate of São Maharo is extremely severe) but also infinite patience, courage, and an iron will. The language alone offers great difficulties. Dr. Thompson has advanced far beyond the first British explorer's work in recording it phonetically, and we have here a copy of her written vocabulary, but I believe I am right in saying that it can only be really learnt from the natives themselves. It was several years before Dr. Thompson herself had learnt sufficient to begin evangelistic work—the few white people who were on the island when she arrived were able to teach her very little before they were forced to leave.

“The first essential for work in this Field is a sound elementary knowledge of medicine, with a special knowledge of local ailments. Here again Dr. Thompson has, so to speak, charted the course (her work was recognized by the University of Sheffield, which awarded her her honorary degree) but a working knowledge can only be gained by experience, and this experience must be founded on thorough mastery of the first principles of Medicine. Probably a year's special study in London would be required, though a young and alert mind might perhaps master the subject sooner. Such technical subjects as building, sanitation, etc., have also to be studied. In a backward part of the world like São Maharo the natives look to the missionary for guidance in everything.

“But I am trying to tell you what I can only tell very imperfectly. It would be much better if

you were to call on Dr. Thompson and learn everything there is to know from her. She will be overjoyed at the thought of gaining a recruit, and she will be able to put all the facts before you. She has been very poorly since her return from Bristol, but I have had a note from her this morning to say that she is much better. I should arrange, if possible, to see her before you see me. It would be better, perhaps, if you just said to begin with that you were interested in her work and would like to know more about it. Until you feel convinced that there is no obstacle to your joining her it would be unkind to raise her hopes. I shall not say anything to her myself just yet. Just at present I am very much worried about her health, but I am sure it would do her good to see you. Her address is—17, Ennersley Gardens, Kennington.

“In closing, let me say again that if you feel convinced that you are to find your life work in the Master’s service in São Maharo it will be a great joy to us to do all we can to help you.

“Believe me,

“Yours sincerely;

“Hilda M. Green.

With this letter in her pocket Barbara went to Kennington.

§

Miss Thompson was still in bed. The blind had only been let up a little way, and she could not quite read the clock on the mantelpiece, but she thought that it must be nearly nine. This was the

third time that Mrs. Fuller had brought up her breakfast. "It's no trouble," she had said, "and you did ought to have some extra rest, it was too much for you going all that way down to Bristol, it was really." And it was very nice, having breakfast in bed. But it wouldn't do. When you had had breakfast there was nothing that made you get up quickly. Nothing to hurry for. And if she went on like this, the next thing would be having dinner in bed too.

It was a new thing that had to be conquered, this tired feeling. Mrs. Fuller wanted to make her an invalid, like poor Miss Elverton. And she wasn't an invalid any longer. The giddy-fits were less frequent now, yes, certainly less frequent in the last few days; the aches and pains were still hanging about, but everyone had them. It was just this tiredness. Not sleepiness, but a tired feeling in all the limbs and in the head. Partly old age, perhaps. "Of course, I'm not as young as I was," she thought. But partly too, the air of London. Kennington, with the houses pressing in all round, and the river so close—it couldn't be healthy. "It's the sea I want," she said. "A few weeks on the sea would make me a different woman." Invalid? Nonsense! It was the tired feeling that London gave to everyone, and if you were not used to London it was much worse.

The idea, always present in her mind, became a rooted conviction. The sea. The sea would put her right almost as soon as she first breathed the salty air.

She would get up as soon as Mrs. Fuller had taken away the breakfast-tray. Or before, if she didn't

come soon. It was just another little trick of Mrs. Fuller's to keep her in bed, not coming for ever so long to take away the tray. She would feel less tired when the blind had been put right up.

She decided to give Mrs. Fuller five more minutes, and she lay still, with her eyes half open. It was comfortable, lying quite still, and it would have been nice, but for the feeling that you ought to be getting up. The room looked strange, in the half light. Her eyes were behaving rather oddly—she seemed to see figures and faces in the shadows. Once—that was yesterday or perhaps the day before—she had been almost certain that someone was sitting beside the dressing-table. She had even seemed to hear someone speak; not words that she could understand, but an unmistakably human voice. Of course, it was just being all alone, and the room being so dark. But somehow it was frightening. Not the figures themselves; they were not ghoulish or threatening; only the fact that she could not help seeing them. when she knew that there was nothing there at all.

She heard someone coming upstairs, and then a knock on the door. That was Mrs. Fuller, and when she had taken away the tray and let up the blind Miss Thompson would get up; quickly, before the comfort of the bed tempted her again. But when the door opened it was Miss Saule.

Miss Saule said: "Good morning! I thought you would like your letter."

"A letter? For me?"

"Yes, from abroad. Shall I put up the blind?"

"Oh, thank you!"

Miss Saule would have liked to know the con-

tents of the letter, but she was too polite to stay. "I hope it's good news for you," she said, and went away.

The first letter for many days. It was quite an excitement, and Miss Thompson held it in her hand for a few moments, relishing the prospect. The address was in a strange handwriting. She had an idea that she had seen it before, but it did not belong to any of her friends. The postmark was Port Elizabeth.

She opened the envelope carefully, fearful of tearing the letter inside. It was from Captain Jornay.

"Dear Miss Thompson," it ran, "I am returning the money you sent me. It only reached me a few days ago, as the address you sent it to is a place I don't call at very frequently now. I am much obliged to you, but as my action was against your expressed wish I cannot accept the money. An old man has little enough to do with his money, and I was glad enough to use it in a way I thought right. I shall need a few good marks when I stand underneath the marble throne, and I haven't spent much time getting them in the last few years. So that matter's closed. And don't go thinking I've been generous, because I'm not that sort. You've been decent to me once or twice and I owed you more than that.

"I had reason to call at Harbour Town not long back and a Tulasu youth came and spoke to me. I couldn't make out a word of what he said, it may have been meant to be Portuguese, but it didn't sound like it. But he gave me a bit of paper, and

as it had 'Tomon' written on it I gathered that it was meant for you. I therefore send it enclosed. The lad seemed in good health, but unhappy.

"I hope you are quickly recovering your former health. No doubt you are in the hands of a good doctor, who will tell you, as I did without charging you, that you want a long and complete rest."

The paper enclosed was a leaf torn from a cookery book. Miss Thompson recognized it—the last sheet in the Soups section of the old book that had served her for many years in the Mission House kitchen. On the blank side the word "Tomon" was scrawled, in block letters, underlined, and beneath was a message in dialect, evidently composed with much labour and correction. It took Miss Thompson some time to decipher it; the writer had remembered none too well how to form the letters which she had so patiently taught him. By guessing a word here and there she at length made a comprehensible translation.

"The ship come but you not come. We go always to the sea to look out. All still love you. Why reason do you not come back, question. Sydney is killed by a hunter. We have no one. We wait. Come soon. Peter."

Miss Thompson put both letters back in the envelope, and started to get up. It had to be done slowly—a jerky movement might bring on things. Carefully she pushed back the clothes, and then, moving first shoulders and then legs to the edge of the bed, slid on to the floor. A little push with one

arm, and she was upright. She felt very unsteady, as she had felt on getting up yesterday. It was a mistake to stop in bed so long.

With great caution she moved along beside the bed to the washstand. The first movements had to be cautious; after that she would be stronger and able to walk quite easily. Mrs. Fuller had not yet brought the hot water, but the jug of cold was full. Trying to lift it she found it heavier than usual. Perhaps if she gave a call Miss Saule would come and pour it out for her. She could lift it herself, of course, but there was just a risk. And Miss Saule might help her to dress.

But she had dressed by herself yesterday, and yesterday had been rather a bad day, with the tiredness heavier than usual. It would be just weakness to be helped over dressing. The only difficulty was to get the water poured out. Well, she would just put the sponge in the jug this morning. Washing wasn't really necessary, when you did nothing all day, and a sponge over the face and arms would be enough to freshen her up. The cold water livened her, but she sat down to put on her clothes. Although it was a more awkward way of dressing it was worth while; the great thing was to reserve as much strength as possible—for the time being.

The dressing took a long time, particularly the stockings and boots; and when she had prayed she gave herself a rest of two minutes. Then she felt stronger and went to the little wardrobe and took out her hat and outdoor coat. Still no sign of Mrs. Fuller. It would be better if she could get out of the house without seeing Mrs. Fuller; better to see

no one if it could possibly be helped. They would ask questions, and offer to do her errand for her, or to go with her. She put on the outdoor coat. Much stronger now. She could stand quite firmly without leaning against the end of the bed. You always felt stronger when you were in your clothes.

She went to the door. It was a little difficult to open—Mrs. Fuller had never succeeded in getting it put quite right—but by throwing her weight back with a jerk she succeeded. Then she stood listening. She could hear Mrs. Fuller's voice, far below, but nothing else. She went to the top of the stairs and listened again.

Very slowly, holding tight on to the banisters for fear of missing a step in the dark she began to go down. It would be harder work, she reflected, coming up again, but less frightening. Carefully, step by step, to the landing below. A little pause for breath, and then on again, down the next flight, one step at a time. In the front passage it was lighter, and she passed along to the front door quickly. She heard voices in the dining-room, Miss Saule and Miss Brittain talking. Mrs. Fuller's voice, explaining loudly about some vegetables, came from behind in the kitchen. No one heard when she opened the front door, stepped outside, and closed it as quietly as possible behind her.

In the street she felt suddenly frightened. It was several days since she had been out of doors—not since that tiredness had come over her—and the world beyond Number 17 had become strange in absence. The light was very bright, after the darkness of the stairs, and there was a confusion of noises, children playing in the street, a man calling

for old clothes, trams in the main road. But of course you were safe in England. No snakes, no poisoned arrows, nothing that you couldn't see coming. You just had to watch where you were going and be careful. It would be much safer, though, on board ship.

She walked very slowly along the pavement, towards the main road. She could walk ever so far if only she went slowly, with a little rest now and then. The difficulty would be to cross the main road; there was a refuge, but you had to look sharp over the two dangerous passages, across to the refuge and then to the other side. Still, that was a long way ahead, and it wasn't as bad as giving a lecture to four hundred schoolgirls. She marked the stages of her progress by the lamp-posts. The first one took a long time to reach. The second came sooner. The third was not accomplished so easily.

She reached the main road at last and turned right towards the place where the refuge was, two lamp-posts away. The difficult part of the expedition was going to begin now. She quickened her pace to give herself courage and reached the first lamp-post.

A taxi passed by, close to the pavement, moving almost at a walking pace. Looking back, Miss Thompson saw another coming towards her on the far side of the road. Her mind was spurred into rapid movement. A taxi. It was dangerous, but so easy. She had no idea what it would cost, but with the money back from Captain Jornay she was a rich woman. And it would be saving strength, saving up the precious strength that would have to

last her till she got on board ship. She stepped to the edge of the pavement and held up her hand.

The driver had almost passed before he saw her, but he jammed on his brakes and swung round.

"Wherefor?" he demanded, thrusting out an arm and opening the door.

"Can you take me to Welt Street?"

"Take you to Timbuctoo if y' like."

"No, Welt Street."

"Off Cheapside?"

"Yes."

"Orlright. Jump in!"

"Will it cost very much?"

"Oh no, inn."

"How much?"

"Can't say. We might get held up on the bridge."

"About two shillings?"

"Well, this isn't a horse bus, y' know."

"More than two shillings?"

"Might be three and six. Depends if we get held up."

"Will you promise not to make it more than three shillings and sixpence?"

"Orl right, orl right!"

She hesitated. "There will still be the getting back," she thought. But to get there without spending any more strength—it was worth the money.

"Will you drive very slowly and carefully?" she asked.

The man grinned. There wasn't going to be much change out of three-and-six.

"Y'know," he said, "I has a special rate for going round the park and keeping away from the lights."

seen on real lakes and mountains. It was odd that she, who had been so far round the globe, had seen nothing but green and grey and the soft blue of hollow skies, when everywhere else the cliffs were purple and the sky a flat azure brightness. Odd, too, that she who had for so many days felt the roll and pitch of a ship plunging through high seas should be a humble stranger among these young men, sanctified by the protecting counter, who knew how many dollars you could buy to-day for a pound and whether there was a sleeping-coach on the train to Omsk; men of the world, men who kept the world beneath their fingers in fat volumes, men who handed you the keys to the five continents and went home at night on the Underground to little houses in Highbury. Surely you had only to——

The fat little man in a brown suit noticed her at last.

He asked: "Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," she said firmly. "I want to know the sailings for Cape Town."

"Cape Town? Yes, Madam. About what date would you be thinking——?"

"Now. I mean, as soon as possible."

The clerk put his hand below the counter and seized a handful of booklets.

"Well, the *Bodiam Castle* leaves Tilbury on Thursday. It might be too late—I could ring up—what class would you be travelling?"

"Third—no, second class, I think."

"Second class," he repeated. Already he had taken a form from below the counter and begun to fill in particulars. It was an action which made

Miss Thompson's heart throb sensibly. "What is the name?" he asked.

"Thompson, Miss Thompson. Is it a fast ship?"

"Oh yes," he replied smoothly, "very fast. Will you wait a minute, please, and I'll get them on the phone."

He went to the back of the office and was out of sight for a few minutes. Coming back he sold a ticket for Paris to an important stockbroker, and then turned to her again.

"Yes," he said, "there are still a few berths left. You would like a single cabin?"

She answered, rather breathlessly: "I don't mind."

"You would have to pay a little more."

"Oh, it must be as cheap as possible!"

"Well, there's a two-berth cabin, Number 140, and there's another, Number 128."

He dived again, and produced from a drawer a map of the *Bodiam Castle*, all lines and dotted lines and figures and letters.

"This is Number 140," he said, pointing with his finger.

"Oh, yes, that will be all right."

"Or, if you prefer it, this is Number 128."

"Yes, that will do."

"But—which do you prefer?"

"I don't mind. Either will do."

"You can take your choice, you know."

He smiled at her patiently. How stupid he was!

"Number 140!" she said with determination.

"Number 140," he repeated, and wrote it on the form. Rapidly he wrote other particulars, filling

one space after another with his sprawling, meaningless handwriting, jerking out questions from the corner of his mouth. "Passport? Baggage insurance?" From a long rack he selected rubber stamps and banged them on to some of the remaining white spaces. "I shall have to ask you for a deposit," he said. "Let me see—seventeen pounds."

She was taken aback.

"But I haven't got seventeen pounds."

"You haven't got your cheque-book? No, no, well, if you would be good enough to post a cheque, as early as possible—you see, there isn't much time——"

It wasn't so easy as she had hoped. She had forgotten about the deposit in making her plans. Of course, Miss Green had always seen about that.

"Is a deposit absolutely necessary?" she asked.

"Well, it's one of the rules. You see, in booking passages——"

She interrupted him wildly. She was not going to lose everything just because of the rules they had in a stuffy little office. "You see, I'm not paying for the passage myself. It's the Edith Warrener Women's Missionary Society—you know, in Frolick Street——"

She was rather exhausted. It was such hard work, in this stuffy place, answering questions and explaining. It made you feel rather faint.

"Oh, I see." The clerk seemed to be reassured. "If I apply to them, they will forward the deposit. Or perhaps you——"

"No, that won't do. You see, they don't know I'm going. They'll be quite willing to send the

money after I'm gone—perhaps I had better see the manager.”

The clerk was doubtful. “Well—he’s usually rather busy.”

“I think he will see me,” she said. With her voice so watery it was difficult to make it sound important. “I have been here to book my passage before. More than once.”

“Was that—recently?”

“The last time I went out. About eight years ago.” Seeing that he looked doubtful, she added: “I’m sure Mr. Hall will remember me.”

“Mr. Hall? He’s been gone from here some years.”

The plan, the brave plan she had built up was tottering. For a moment she thought of asking to be allowed to telephone to Miss Green. But she knew, almost certainly, what the result would be. Miss Green would be ever so kind, ever so gentle and persuading. Miss Green could not see those dark people staring out across the sea, waiting. There was just a chance, but the risk was too great.

“Very well,” she said. “I will get my passage from another office.”

“Just one minute!”

She had moved him. Thank God! The man was going to do something. God was going to make things all right.

“If you’ll wait just half a minute I’ll see if I can see the manager.”

He went away, and in two minutes an elderly man came through a door at the back of the office.

“Miss Thompson?”

"Yes."

"There's some little difficulty, I understand——"

"Yes. It's about the deposit. I have to go as soon as possible—the ship that goes next Thursday. You know the Edith Warrener Missionary Society?"

"Edith Warrener? Yes, oh yes. We do some business with them from time to time. Let me see, the manager there is Miss—Miss——"

"Miss Green."

"Miss Green, yes, of course. I've seen her more than once. A very businesslike little lady. I think she was here——"

"Well, the Society is going to pay my passage."

"The Society, yes." He had made up his mind already. Of course, Morgan was quite right to be cautious, but if there was anything wrong with the old dear it was just encrustation of the thinking-box. That sort left their umbrellas in railway-carriages but they didn't leave bad debts on the Company's books. "That will be quite all right," he said.

"You will send your bill to the Society?"

"Yes, that's right."

"When will you send it?"

"Oh, probably at the end of the month." (What a queer old fusser she was!)

"And the deposit?"

"Oh, that will be quite all right!" He did not understand what was still worrying her, but he thought the interview had been long enough.

"Good day," he said.

"Good—but I haven't got the ticket."

"Oh, we shall have to get that. Let me see, yes,

we have your address on the form. The reservation will be sent on to you, to-morrow probably."

"Oh, I see." She was still not quite happy about the deposit. What did he mean by saying: "That will be all right"? It would be a shock for poor Miss Green, but God's purpose had to be worked out. Everything must be all right. "Thank you very much," she said. "Good morning."

The tide of happiness, which she had watched approaching and with such terror feared to lose, caught her now and demolished every obstacle. She left the office in an ecstasy, hardly knowing what uplifted her, conscious only that what she had prayed for had been granted. The small doubt, the fear that there must always be something between a man and perfect fortune, lingered. But it was a doubt to be despised. She had been given victory, and the very idea of victory was too intoxicating to be hindered by the last resistance of tragic possibility. She crossed the pavement with her eyes smiling. The taxi was still there, and the driver, too astonished by the change in her to make any comment, held open the door. Almost without thinking she sat down inside.

"Where to?" the man asked.

"Back," she said.

"Back to where you came from?"

"Yes. Quickly, please."

As the taxi sped down the street she began to think more soberly; more soberly, and more clearly than she had thought in many days. The great joy which had swept over her now seemed to have purged her mind of its tiredness. "There's the question of money," she thought. She had little enough,

but there were a few pounds saved, and the money that Captain Jorjay had sent back would help. There was the getting to the dock. Perhaps Mrs. Fuller knew of someone who had a motor car, or a cart would do. Or else Miss Saule would take her on the Underground, and the luggage could go by Carter Paterson. On the voyage there would be hardly any expenses. Five shillings at the end for the stewardess—most people gave more, but she could explain, as she had done on former occasions. Then there was the passage from Cape Town to São Maharo. Well, the Mission would provide that. They couldn't possibly refuse when she had got as far as Cape Town. She would have to find lodgings until the money came and until she could find a ship. Probably there would be some Christian family who would let her have a room at a cheap rate. She could do a little work as part payment, sewing and mending, and after the sea air she would be fit for housework, perhaps. She might have to buy a new dress at Cape Town. But anything would do, and there were some wonderfully cheap Dutch shops in Nagar Street. What did Carter Paterson charge for taking luggage?

She was still calculating when the taxi stopped. It did not occur to her that she might be driven on to her lodgings, and she stepped out.

"How much is the fare?" she asked.

The man glanced at the meter.

"Nine and six."

She was aghast.

"That's a lot," she said.

"Well, mm, I was waiting close on twenty minutes."

"But you weren't using your motor then—oh, you mean that you might have taken another fare?"

"There it is, on the meter," he said, pointing. "And if we stay talking it will go up another threepence."

Nine and six. It was a lot of money, but perhaps it was not too much for such a victory. The man looked obstinate. He might call a policeman.

She opened her bag and took out two half-crowns, a florin, two shilling-pieces, five pennies and two halfpennies.

"Good morning!" she said.

He looked at the money, spread out in his palm.

"Not one bad coin among 'em," he said.

On her way back to Number 17 Miss Thompson did not count the lamp-posts. She walked bravely past them, head erect, eyes shining. It was slow, really, not a young woman's walk, but to her it seemed easy, and as her weak legs moved her steadily along the pavement, never calling for a moment's relief, she could fancy that she was walking with the old stride that had carried her along so many forest paths, up steep hills with hardly a check to the pace, over the cattle-tracks that led from the villages to the river-side. She would be striding along those tracks again, soon.

No one saw her as she let herself in at the door. The house was very quiet. Mrs. Fuller was out, perhaps, and the ladies would be reading in their rooms or writing in the dining-room. That was a good thing. It would be unwise to tell them—they would try to dissuade her or might even tell Miss Green—and just at present it seemed as if the good

news must burst from her. At the foot of the stairs she rested. Beneath the excitement, a physical sensation told her that she must still be cautious; just for a few more hours—it was nicer to say “hours” than “days”—she must save up all her strength. Of course, she was well now. The good news had just completed the long convalescence. But of late she had used her limbs so little that they must be treated gently at first. She would walk up and down the deck when she was on board ship; that would put them right. One step at a time, almost as cautiously as she had come down, she began to go up the stairs. “Of course I could go much faster,” she thought, rejoicing, “but it’s worth being careful.”

When she reached her room she fell on her knees, her breast resting against the bed, her arms stretched at full length across the quilt. It was several minutes before she rose, and, trembling strangely, took off her hat and coat. Then, in her excitement, she did not know what to do first. There was really nothing to do before she left; translation work, which had kept her busy whenever she had felt fit for it, was impossible in her present mood; she had to get ready, and there was so little preparation to be done. Mrs. Fuller must be paid, but that would have to be left till later; not too late, for fear that just such a little matter should hold her back and make her miss the ship; but not yet, because Mrs. Fuller would want to know everything and would tell everyone else. There would be an extra week to pay for not giving notice; Mrs. Fuller might say No, but it was only fair to pay the extra. She ought to give some little

presents to the other ladies, but she could explain that she was going to send them something from Cape Town, some quaint little thing that they didn't sell in England. That was almost everything except the packing. There were no letters to write. Oh yes, one letter.

From a drawer in the dressing-table—the top drawer, that stuck rather—she took a little pad of writing-paper, a pen, and a bottle of ink. She thought for a minute; in so short a time the language had become difficult to her and she found it hard to translate her thoughts into phrases of the required simplicity; then she wrote: “My dear, dear children. Your letter has come to me. I am coming back to you, in the same way that I said to you.” (She underlined the words “I am coming back to you” with two heavy, triumphant strokes.) “I shall be at home again when only a little time has gone. Look for me when this letter is with you. Be strong in Jesus. I love you all. From Mother.”

She addressed the envelope to “The Christian People of Gahuga.” Probably, she thought, the letter would not reach them before she arrived herself; the postal service to São Maharo was a chance affair, as she had often found to her cost; but the possibility of giving them new hope was worth while. If only she could send a message by telegraph! It would have been the coping-stone to her happiness if she could have given them the news now, within a few hours. Surely, though, her thoughts would somehow reach them, surely something would tell them that God was working for their happiness and for hers! She put the letter in

the envelope, but left it unsealed; the post did not go till five, and she might think of some other simple message which she could add to cheer them.

Now there was the packing, the best task of all. Not very much to pack, and most of it would have to be left till nearly the last moment—washing things and hairbrushes, boot-cleaning material, bedroom slippers, one of the nightdresses. The other was being washed; Mrs. Fuller would probably let her have that and the other things to-morrow. But some underclothes could go in straight away, and the old rug, and the blue dress. The blue dress was beyond wearing on board ship—people always dressed so smartly, even in the second class—but it would do for a few more months in Gahuga. The books could go in too, all except the Bible. No, it would be better to have the writing and translation things on top, and then she could get them out easily to do some work on the voyage, if it was smooth. She took out the books from the top drawer, to make sure she had them all, and laid them in a pile on the dressing-table, just beside the letter. Then, one by one, she emptied the other drawers and piled up the contents on the bed. There were plenty of stockings, carefully darned and fit for a little use yet. She might have to get two more pairs in Cape Town, but these would see her through the journey; most of the darns were in the foot and those didn't matter. Two pairs, three pairs, could go in straight away; three of the oldest, which could not be worn until she reached home. Now for the trunk.

The ancient leather trunk, worn with age and by

a dozen voyages, was underneath the bed; awkward to get out. She managed in time by sitting on the floor and pushing it with her feet. It was covered with dust; Mrs. Fuller was conscientious within her powers, but with seven bedrooms to look after she made "out of sight, out of mind" her motto. If Miss Thompson gave a call she would come scurrying upstairs, panting with haste, and would work with a duster till the trunk almost shone. But it wouldn't do for Mrs. Fuller to know that the trunk was wanted. Well, it didn't matter about the dust for the present. The inside was fairly clean, and the newspaper could be changed with that which lined the dressing-table drawers, less old and crumpled. Miss Thompson worked busily. First something heavy for the bottom; well, there wasn't really anything very heavy. A book would have to go at the end where there was a hole in the bottom; no, a pair of stockings; they might get damp, and rather dirty, but it would be better than having the book completely spoilt. Now, the rug, flat, and then the two photographs, face downwards, where the glass would stand the best chance of not being broken. Would Mrs. Fuller notice that the photographs had gone from the dressing-table? She would have to pretend not to hear if Mrs. Fuller said anything. The ink was a problem, as usual. But she would want that again, so it could go in last of all, and Mrs. Fuller might have a piece of corrugated paper to wrap it in. Or a piece of thick brown paper.

Oh, the new village plan! That must go in flat, on top of the rug. Or perhaps it would be all right rolled. She pulled it out and looked at it. Yes, it was more or less complete now, but a few alterations

would be needed. The old women's house would have to be shifted further away from the river—in the present position it would be damp. That would probably mean shifting the Service House lower down. Those points would have to be thought out carefully on the voyage, because the village wasn't going to remain a mere idea on paper any longer; it was too badly needed. As soon as she was settled in she would get some big men to a meeting and explain what the plan meant and cajole them into starting the building. There would be little enough time to superintend, with all those arrears of work, but if she could fire the enthusiasm of one or two of the men they could soon make a start when she had pegged out the positions.

She put the plan down carefully, with a piece of newspaper between it and the rug. It was rather painful, so much stooping, and it would be much easier if the trunk were on a chair. It was still quite light, but an awkward thing to lift by herself. She considered the problem for a few moments and then decided that it could be managed; she could pull up one end, rest it on the chair, then the other end, and push forward. But when she started it was not very easy. Stooping to grasp the handle, she had to straighten her body a little to pull it up; she could do it by bending her arm, but her arm had been rather weak lately and she was frightened of straining it. (Reserve strength! Reserve strength!) She was surprised to find the weight so great, and in the first attempt she failed; but after a moment's rest she tried again, and this time she succeeded in getting the one end safely on to the chair. Now for the other end. Perhaps it would be better to take

out the things she had put in already; that would make a little difference and the trunk was so extraordinarily heavy, much heavier, surely, than it had ever been before. Only, that would mean more stooping, which she was aiming to avoid.

She rested for a few moments. Such a business, just to get a nearly empty trunk on to a chair! Of course she would be able to manage that sort of thing quite easily after a few days of sea air. And thinking of the voyage—*Thursday*, on Thursday she would be sliding down the Thames—she laughed at her predicament. It was a child's laughter. Thursday, on Thursday was the treat, the greatest of all possible treats, that she had been promised so long. It didn't matter now what she felt like, it didn't matter if she couldn't lift an empty trunk. She was packing now, actually packing all her belongings, ready to go home. She waited for still another quarter of a minute (Reserve strength! Reserve strength!) and then rose and stooped to seize the handle. This end would be heavier, with all the weight of the trunk sloping towards it; but she had lectured to four hundred schoolgirls and got the better of a smart clerk in an office, and she could lift a trunk on to a chair. With a jerk she pulled up the handle. She had only to hold on now and push forward. She pushed, panting, and the chair toppled over, and the trunk came down to the floor. With a little cry she fell forward across the trunk. She got up slowly, pulled the chair on to its legs, and stood still, trembling. It was all right; she was not hurt. Then suddenly she gasped and sank back on to the chair.

It was a giddy-fit, but worse than any giddy-fit

she had had before. She had to hold herself tense, commanding every muscle to remain rigid. The least movement would give her a pain like a red-hot iron, somewhere in her chest, which would make her cry out. She felt faint, but she must keep still, quite, quite, still. It would pass off soon, but she must keep still.

She sat still as a statue, but it did not pass off. Gradually, inch by inch, with infinite agony, she dropped her arms till they rested on her lap. Then still, quite still. She could hear a clock ticking, and noises of children outside, somewhere down the street. A car drove past. The world was real and normal, but she, like an ornament on the mantelpiece, could only stay where she was, inanimate, chained by substance. Four minutes must have gone already. The fit had never lasted so long before, never before held her in so tight and cruel a grip. Because her body was so petrified her brain was becoming mercurial; she seemed, all at once, to have a clearer understanding, but she could not control the rush of thoughts which took her back into forgotten years and away to past anxieties and absurdities and always back again to the present, the still glorious present. It was a bad fit, the worst fit so far, but the last, please God, of the long exile. When she felt that torturing power seize her again she would be on the high seas, southbound, every moment taking her nearer and nearer home. She just had to wait, patiently, patiently, God give her the patience! until it was over; then freedom, until mile after mile of grey sea was stretching between her and those who would hold her back. It was the last trial of patience;

for the last time she was prisoner, bound against the very effort to struggle.

The Mission House would certainly have to be repaired. One of the children would give her covering until it was ready. Services would have to be in the open, and it was going to be difficult to find a suitable place to use as a temporary dispensary. But the repairs would not take very long; they must not take long; if none of the men would help she would do the whole thing herself—she was a better carpenter than any Tulasu, even after all the training she had given them. Would the carpentering tools be all right? The tool-box was locked, but it might have been broken open and the tools might have got damp. Well, the repairs must be done somehow, and quickly. Then she could get to work. All the arrears would mean delay, but then things would go forward fast. The work, the movement that she had dreamt of, was in its childhood; actually, it had hardly begun. All these years she had been digging in, digging herself deep into the very soil of Maharo, getting the people to know her and trust her, at first a few then a few more. And now the fulfilment was going to begin, now at last, on that carefully built foundation, a new São Maharo was going to rise. God give me time! she prayed. There was so much to do, so little time. It was not enough to make a Christian Gahuga and a Christian Homar Town. The message and all that it meant must spread through the island like a prairie fire. It was only a little island. Only a tiny part of the vineyard that God had given her to cultivate. She must do it well. How could she answer, when she stood

before Him, if her work in that island was incomplete? She must work harder, more methodically, more rapidly. The first stages had taken too long. Directly she got back to it she would plunge herself into it, with a strength and energy that she had never used before. Such a little island; and all Africa was waiting for the message, India, China. Waiting, while she, to whom the message had been given, sat still in a chair and listened to the clock ticking the minutes away.

She thought that by an effort she might shake off the grip, and drawing in her breath she tried to jerk herself on to her feet. But her body moved only a part of an inch and with a sob of anguish she again surrendered. It was no good. Patience. Patience. It was God's will—the last trial before he let her go back rejoicing to the vineyard. She must wait a little longer, quite still. Quite still. The sounds in the street had become fainter; she could still hear children's voices, but they seemed a long way off, receding, growing quieter and quieter. And strangely, it was growing darker. Surely it was not time for the sun to set! Darker, and closer; something was wrong with the air in the room, making it difficult to breathe. It was thin and sharp, hurting the lungs and throat. Surely she had left the window open? She could not turn her head to see, but she was sure she remembered. Yes, she had opened it when she came in. But the air was failing. Something was keeping it out, keeping out the air and the light and holding back the sounds in the street. If only it would keep light! It was rather frightening to sit here in the darkness, unable to move. It must

be later than she had thought. It was still getting darker, much darker.

She realized then, as her breath went in and out, quicker and quicker, that it was a race for time. She would have to get out of this room before the thin air choked her, and until the grip on her body was released she could neither move nor cry out. The fit must be over soon, but there was not much time. If the air got too thin she would not be able to go back to Maharo. The ticket was coming and the packing was begun, but she couldn't go back unless she could breathe, proper, deep breaths. You couldn't breathe in this air. If she missed this ship there might be another. There might be another, but she must go on this one. They were waiting for her, out there. She must go. She must go. Before the air got thinner. Otherwise, the work. Unfinished. She must go. The work was waiting. Why wasn't she starting? She was going to go back. Must go back. And the room was quite dark, and the sounds had stopped altogether, and something was holding her, tight, tight, on the chair.

She realized at last that she had made a mistake. It wasn't necessary to breathe at all. The air had gone altogether, so it was no good trying to breathe, and when she didn't breathe there was no pain. She was all right now. No pain at all. Only she still couldn't move. If you didn't breathe you didn't have to hold yourself still, because something kept your body motionless. Nothing told it to move. Yes, that was what it was. The part of her that gave the orders was keeping quiet. That was why she couldn't move. Even when she wanted

to. But of course it must come back. When the air came. She had been to sleep, perhaps, and when she had had another sleep the air would come back and she would breathe and move her body again. No, the moving part couldn't come back. Once it was gone you couldn't get it back. But how was she to get to the ship, without the part that made things move? She couldn't stay here, she had to get to the ship. All her life she had been trying to get to the ship. She had given up everything for that. She might have had children and pretty dresses, but she had wanted to be on the ship. It was all right, there was no pain now, but she couldn't do anything, couldn't help herself. She must get someone to help her. Her mouth wouldn't move. She could only make a noise inside herself.

"Jesus! Jesus!"

In the silence she heard a footstep on the stairs. Someone was coming up at last. Very slowly, very soft footsteps. She heard them not through her ears but with something inside. Someone coming up to tell her how to move. Almost at the top now. Now just outside.

The door opened, and someone was standing in the room. Just by the door. She couldn't see who it was in the black darkness. Perhaps the light would be put on. She wanted to see who it was.

Her eyes, she thought, must be closed, but she stared hard towards the door, and gradually she could see without the light; not the room, but the person by the door. The room was still dark, but the person seemed to have a light with him which showed his face. It was a man, a man with a beard. Someone she had seen before, someone she knew

intimately, but she couldn't remember who it was. He was looking at her, thoughtfully, and he was smiling.

Then she knew who it was. She said: "I want to get back. I promised, I would go back."

Her mouth was still shut, and her throat would not let the words go through. But he looked at her, full of sympathy, and she knew that he understood. At last he spoke to her.

"It's all right."

She could not understand how she was going to get back. But he had said she would, and that was enough. She had got through, and she was going to finish the work. She was going back. That was enough. Perhaps São Maharo was quite close. He had said that it was all right.

She heard a sound, which was all one note and yet it was music, growing louder and clearer. Then the walls of the room fell back and she saw in the distance a brilliant light and rushed forward.

§

"May I come in?" Barbara asked.

There was no reply, but she turned the handle gently and went into the room. There was a trunk at the end of the bed, with a few things lying in the bottom; on the dressing-table a little pile of books and manuscripts, with an open letter addressed to São Maharo. Beside the trunk Miss Thompson was sitting on a chair, her head resting back against the bed-rail. She was smiling, but her eyes were closed.

PART VII

SÃO MAHARO

THE rock which formed the summit of the little hill was shaped like the head of a wolf, the muzzle pointing seawards. The boy sat between the two ears, his arms bent round his knees and his chin resting on clasped hands. If the sky behind him had been quite clear you would have seen him from the sea and thought that he was a piece of rock, a pimple on the wolf's head. He had made his way through the close-growing trees that bordered the foot of the hill with a ring two miles in depth and covered the lower slopes; had scrambled up the slippery grass until he could look back over the tree-tops; and then, foot by foot, picking the grips and toeholds that he now knew so well, had surmounted the last twenty yards of steep, bare rock.

From this vantage point he looked steadily across the sea. By turning his head to right and left he could see the horizon as almost a semi-circle. If he worked along the little ledge and swung his body out to look round the wolf's ear he would see another few inches, the space that a ship's mast would take half an hour to cover. But he always believed, he did not know why, that at that point, straight ahead where he was looking now, he would see it first; the little cloud of dark smoke which would change at last to a tiny grey object that was the steamer coming from the other island—

England, just beyond where you could see—and making for Harbour Town.

It was an hour since the sun had gone down into the sea, the sky's crimson had turned to green, and from green to grey. There was no moon to-night, and soon nothing would be visible, not even the line where the sea met the sky. The boy was cold, for the sweat had dried on his body and there was nothing to shield him from the sharp wind which had sprung up as the light faded. Well as he knew the way, it would be difficult, getting through the trees in the darkness; and then there was the long run home.

He still waited, shivering, peering forward until his eyes made strange images and confused him; still waited, until there was no chance of seeing that cloud of smoke, not even if it were close underneath the shore. Then he got up and began to climb down the rock.

His eyes were sad and frightened. "She does not come," he said.

But the last gangways were up and the last ropes thrown off. The *Lady Isabel* had slipped silently down the Solent, cleared the Needles and found her course. With her turbines singing their dull anthem and the long bright shaft spinning and the screws mincing the water into white tempestuous foam, she was pushing the grey sea behind her, and the sharp line of her bows cut her passage, a mile in three minutes, towards the south.

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"Well, if you're going up to Jo'burg and James is

after this female it doesn't look as if I shall get much tennis. D'you mind pushing those cigarettes a bit nearer? Thanks."

"I'm sorry, laddie. Business is business, as the eunuch said to the third lady. May I?"

"Do!"

The elder man—he was thirty-five, lean and brown and bored—pushed the decanter across the desk.

"I can send for some more soda," he said. "What's the time? Look here, I must just sign these before three o'clock. D'you mind putting the stamp on and I'll just initial—that'll be quicker. Thanks. No, don't go! There's nothing to do, really there isn't. I shan't see you for weeks, shall I?" He had taken a pile of papers and began to scrawl his signature rapidly. "You'll tell me if you spot any grammatical errors. I've a new girl. Oh yes, very intelligent, she holds four or five degrees, but I haven't yet made her see the difference between 'of' and 'and.' Curious. And whenever I dictate 'wise and sober' she writes 'whisky and soda.' No, not deaf, but they can't teach everything in eighteen terms at Stellenbosch. No, I've done that pile, thanks. That's the lot. Did you say it took twenty-four days to get those three cases through?"

"Twenty-four—including Sundays, Holy Days, and native festivals."

"But how far is it? Can't be more than three hundred miles."

"Less. About two eighty."

"Excuse!" said a Kaffir messenger, standing at the door. "A lady asks to see you."

"She can't," said Shond. "Has she brought a letter or anything?"

"A card, sir."

Shond took the card, instinctively passed his thumb across the surface, and read: "Miss Gastell."

"Did she say what her business was?"

"No sir."

"Canvasser. Tell her to wait. I'll see her later."

The messenger withdrew. "But do you mean to say that they were properly consigned? Proper address and everything?"

"Properly addressed? My dear laddie, they had the address written in bright red letters on yellow labels and nailed all over them; with 'This Side Up' and 'Extremely Fragile' and 'This may explode any minute' and all the rest of it. I couldn't 've done it more prettily myself. Lucas says he sat by and watched them tacking on labels like a cat watching a mouse. Then he went down to the station with them, yes, in the wagon, sitting on the floorboards and getting bruised all over, and he handed them over to the stationmaster with his own pretty hands. 'Stationmaster!' he said with a dry sob in his throat, 'these cases are the most precious things I have in the world. I beseech you to treat them as if they held the bones of your father-in-law and your mother-in-law, and to take all due and diligent care that they be safely and tenderly delivered to the address as per label in the shortest possible time, failing which your guts will be taken out and broken into a thousand pieces and destroyed with fire and thrown into the market-place.' Well, the stationmaster took them, with tears in his eyes——"

"Excuse!" said the messenger, appearing again. "The lady says she is in a hurry."

"Well, tell her that I can't see her without an appointment, and she'd better come back to-morrow. Yes, go on."

"Well, the stationmaster took them, with tears in his eyes, and said that henceforth they would be to him as his own long-lost children. Then he called the guard and the engine-driver and they all knelt down together and had a little prayer, and then they took the cases one by one and lifted them as if they were made of glass and laid them gently on the floor of the truck with cotton-wool between each one. Then they locked up the truck and sealed it and wrote 'Urgent' all over it and the engine-driver swore a solemn oath he'd give his life for the sake of the goods if need be, and they hitched the thing on to the back of a passenger express and off it goes, as merry as a carnival. And damn me, no sooner had the train gone ten miles than the driver found he wasn't making the pace as per schedule, there being a slight head-wind, and out he jumps, trots along——"

"Excuse!" said the messenger again. "The lady says her business is very important. She must see the manager without any delay."

"God blast her!" said Shond. "What sort of female is it?"

"White sir, very young."

"White? Do you mean to say, white all over?"

"Head and hands white, sir."

"And young?"

"Yes sir."

"Very young?"

"Yes sir. Very pretty lady."

"Then why the hell didn't you say so before? Bring her up. Move!"

"Laddie," said Pemmett, "I'll put up two of White Horse that she's an elderly Malay with a squint."

"In that case the interview will last forty seconds. Better put that bottle out of sight, just in case—Well, the engine-driver hopped off, and then——?"

The girl who came in was not local, Shond saw at a glance. Her skin wouldn't remain as fair as that for long. He rose and went across the room to meet her, with his lanky stride.

"Miss Gastell? I'm so sorry I had to keep you waiting. This is our busy season and I had to get off a lot of cables. This is Mr. Pemmett, my assistant." He winked at Pemmett. "I'm afraid the office is rather untidy, but we believe in being practical rather than ornamental on the outposts. You'll find that. Well—do sit down, won't you?—can I do anything to help you?"

"Yes," said Barbara. "You're sure I'm not inconveniencing you in any way——?"

"Not in the very least! I——"

"No, I thought not. Well, I'm told that you must know how I can get a passage to São Maharo."

"São—São—? Oh, São Maharo, yes! I remember. I'd forgotten."

"I know there's no regular service, but I understand it's possible to pick up a cargo-boat going that way——"

"But—excuse me butting in—are you quite certain that you want to go to São Maharo? I mean——"

"Yes, I do want to go there."

"But it's a most out-of-the-way place, a most ghastly little island. I remember now, I met a fellow once who had landed there—he got on board again pretty sharp. He told me that the place was disease-ridden, full of incredibly beastly natives—Geoffrey, you remember, don't you, that fellow Grange who said he'd been there?"

"You do know something about it, then?" Barbara interposed.

"Well, as I say——"

"Well, then, perhaps you can tell me roughly how long it is, and where the main villages are, and what the natives are like and what the language is like and what grows there and what are the principal diseases? You mentioned the diseases——"

"One mo, steady on!" It was a cardinal fault in the sex, Shond thought, this desire to swallow information with no heeltaps. "I didn't say I knew everything about the place——"

"Then perhaps you'll admit that I know rather more about it than you do. I can't speak the language fluently, but I should understand it if it was spoken slowly. There is a chapter on the island in Hobartson's memoirs, which you have probably read, but practically all more recent information is in manuscript notes to which very few people besides myself have had access. So it's not unlikely that my knowledge is more up-to-date than yours. Yes, thank you, I would like a cigarette. So having disposed of that question, will you please tell me the best way of getting there?"

"I should like to ask just one further question, if I may." (There was only one way with the knowledgeable female, and that was to run the

Harrow stuff for all it was worth.) "If it isn't an impertinence—why exactly do you *want* to go to this plague-spot?"

"It is an impertinence, but if you really want to know, I'm going as a missionary."

"Ah, yes," said Shond.

It was Pemmott who took out an orange handkerchief and blew his nose violently. Shond only put a finger-nail into the corner of his mouth and looked down at the desk with unnatural solemnity.

"By the way, will you have some whisky?" he asked.

"Oh, thank you, that would be rather nice. I am rather ~~not~~. Only a very little, please. Now, where do you think I'm most likely to pick up a ship? Here, or Port Elizabeth, or—where?"

Shond considered the matter seriously. Probably, he thought, there was very little fun to be got out of this girl. She was pretty evidently the sort that pays her own fares. Geoffrey could try her out if he felt like it.

"It's hard to know what to say," he said slowly, in his branch-manager voice. "As far as I know, there's nothing scheduled to call there—I shouldn't think there'd be any mail to be dropped. Probably it's a case of a ship going off its course once in a way to drop a bottle of brandy and pick up a girl or a basket of cabbages or something. It would just be if it happened to occur to the skipper——"

"Well, then, probably you could tell me what companies are sending ships in that direction. If I knew what ship was passing I could arrange for it to be sent off its course. I suppose you've got a map?"

"Yes, but wait a minute."

Shond's ideas started slowly, but once on their way they came with a rush. If the kid wanted to fool about in the wide open spaces, instead of keeping close under the eye of Thomas Cook like a well-brought-up maiden, well, by Jove, let her! It wasn't, after all, his responsibility, and she was being a damn nuisance.

"I say, Geoffrey, what about our friend Jornay?"

"By Jove, yes, that's a thought!"

"Who is Jornay?" Barbara asked.

"Jornay? a most admirable man, isn't he, Geoffrey?"

"Absolutely. One of the very best!"

"Yes, but who is he, and what does he do, and where can I find him?" After so much practice, Barbara was still not expert in controlling her impatience. Hard enough to learn a hopelessly primitive language and to plough through the dreary text-books on elementary anatomy and hygiene; but it was harder to keep one's temper in a world where everything was done by men and done in men's good time; a sex that rambled and fumbled, creatures who refused to impart the least item of information before they had waded through a quagmire of anecdote and reminiscence and description. "Is he a shipowner, or if not what is he?"

"Captain Jornay," said Shond, with polite deliberation, "is a private owner who carries miscellaneous freights to places where ordinary traders don't usually go. If any man is likely to be going near this place Maharo it's him. Of course I can't say definitely, but I think it's your best chance. Don't you think so, Geoffrey?"

"Oh, I do!"

"Well, where can I find him?"

"Ah, where? That is the problem."

"There I think I can be of service," said Pemmett suddenly. "Jornay's here—at least, I think so. A fellow told me he had seen the *Ego* in the Bay—last night, I think he said. Of course, he may have pushed off again, you never know with Jornay."

"And if he is here, where can I find him?"

"He'd probably be on shore somewhere," said Pemmett.

"Helpful, isn't he?" Shond said.

"Well, it's about as near as I can place the old——"

"The fact is, Miss Gastell," said Shond quickly, "he's a retiring sort of chap, Jornay, and you don't often find him in the clubs. He's—well, more keen on being pally with the sailors, no side you know, take his glass with any man. There's a place in the Damrak, that's down by the harbour, called the Kentish Captain; it's a little hotel—well, nothing more than a sailors' hostel, really, not entirely T.T., and you'd probably find someone there who could tell you where you'd be likely to get hold of him. It might be better perhaps not to go after dark—rather a rowdy quarter."

"I should be delighted——" Pemmett began. Shond shot a glance at him, and he finished "to— to do anything further, if——"

"I'll write down that address," said Barbara. "Will you give me a bit of paper, please. All right, I have a pencil."

She wrote the address, and Shond rose in polite intimation.

"I hope you'll be successful," he said.

"I hope so. Good-bye. Oh, thank you for the whisky!"

She went down to the street, where the sun was blazing mercilessly, and walked quickly towards the hotel, dazzled a little by the glare off the pavement. There was no hope of getting anything more out of that lazy beast. Probably she had just wasted three quarters of an hour. *Jornay*! She seemed to remember the name. Well, she must have some tea and then make further inquiries.

But at the end of the street she changed her mind and hailed a taxi.

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"You know," Pemmott said doubtfully, "I rather feel that we ought not to have put that virgin in the way of that scallywag, *Jornay*."

"Well," said Shond, "she asked for it. She was damned rude. Besides, if you don't take the strong line with that sort they come back and ask more questions till your life's a misery. Yes, go on, there's enough for two more. Also it won't be a bad thing for her to meet *Jornay*. It may make her think twice about playing the fool in parts of the world she's not fit for. If she's got an atom of sense she'll take one look at *Jornay* and then go back to *Wuddlicombe Vicarage* like a good little girl."

"'Tis possible. You may have saved her life."

"It's more than likely. You were telling me about those cases that got held up."

"Yes, where was I? Oh yes, the driver kept his eye open for the first suitable siding . . ."

§

There was no access for traffic to the Damrak, which was closed by the water at one end and at the other only connected by a flight of stone steps with the street that ran parallel above it. It was ten feet wide, cobbled, formed by a line of brown houses which faced an artificial creek. It was hard to say why the creek had been constructed, and what return on his capital the engineer had hoped for. In it lay a solitary ancient lighter, its floor strewn with casks and cases which might be full or empty but must surely rot away before anyone thought to move them. Over some a piece of tarpaulin had been tied, full of holes, and bent down towards the middle, so that it formed a conduit, for any rain that fell, into the goods it was supposed to protect. All round the barge, as if gathered for company, there floated leaves and pieces of wood and tins and dead things, joined and loosely carpeted by a brown foam. It was a scene of peacefulness, a parable for those who despise peace. The houses, which were well built, German work, nothing but a straight high wall with windows, stared across it to their counterpart, a high windowed wall on the other side. There was nothing evil about the houses except that they were so silent; some of the windows were broken and the rest so dark, with dirt or with boards nailed inside, that you could not see through them. Their shadow, which stretched half way across the creek, threw the street into gloom; and the gloom was pleasant, though it was actually hotter there, where the sun had been closely trapped since morning. There

were no clotheslines, which might so easily have been stretched across the creek from one window to another; a number of tins and a good deal of rope and broken china lying on the cobbles, but no rusty bicycle wheels, no patched garments hanging from the windows, no ragged children. Neither new nor music, with its silence and simpleness the street had an air of respectability; soiled and faded, but retaining the air of bourgeoisie. It was not the dirt and rubbish, only the stench of rotting vegetation and urine, that made it horrible. Its foreboding was only in the quietness and the blind windows.

There was no sign to mark an inn, but the driver knew the Kentish Captain, and leaving his cab in the street above he led the way to a house that seemed as lifeless as the rest.

"There," he said, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You had better wait for me," Barbara said.

But he insisted on taking his fare, and mumbled something, and it was plain that when he came to these parts he preferred to be without his cab. She paid him, watched him go quickly away, and then pushed open the door he had shown.

It was very dark inside. A small, oblong room, walls boarded to shoulder height, and the rest washed in dull red. There was a counter with a bottle or two and a few glasses. A bored Kaffir leant with his elbows upon it, the end of a burnt-out cigarette hanging from his lips. On the public side two sailors, trimmers, of some South European blood, sat silently on two little wooden chairs, holding empty glasses. A woman lay asleep in a corner.

"Captain Jornay?"

The words seemed to convey nothing to the bar-tender. He only looked at her sleepily, with a little amused smile forming at one end of his mouth. The sailors stared at her in simple surprise.

"I am looking for Captain Jornay." She spoke haltingly in Taal, supposing that he must know a little of that language. Either he knew not a word of it, or she had so mispronounced the words as to make them meaningless. He smiled a little wider, took a glass from under the counter, wiped it, and put it down.

She turned to one of the sailors.

"Habla Vd. español?"

Both the sailors smiled broadly.

"Jornay," she repeated.

Their silence and their smiles frightened her. Elsewhere, she would have felt a fool, and been ready soon after to laugh at her predicament. But here, in the dark, plain room, with nothing to retreat to but the strange street that shut away the town and faced black water, she felt the impulse to laugh insanely and uncontrollably. There was a tension in the room, and the tension belonged wholly to herself. Standing here she could do nothing, say nothing to make them understand what she wanted; and if she turned to go—a visitor who had given no business—there might be a sudden movement; the stillness might bring forth a fury ("Better not go there after dark," Mr. Shond had said), and the door, when she tried to open it, might be locked.

Still, it was all very foolish, with two grinning sailors and a sleepy Kaffir.

"Jornay," she said once again, loudly and clearly.

To her astonishment, one of the sailors repeated: "Jornay."

"Here?" she asked, expressing the question with a gesture.

He shook his head. Then, suddenly inspired, he took out a large watch from his trouser-pocket, held it out solemnly for her to see, and after a long interval turned the hands to seven o'clock, nodding vehemently.

"Girl," he said suddenly.

Of "girl" she could make nothing, and in his new eagerness to make the whole position clear he started to talk volubly, in some unknown tongue with a faintly Latin sound, emphasizing each sentence with rapid and sweeping gestures. Seeing that he only thought her slow and stupid she decided that it was better to pretend she understood. She nodded steadily, and smiled her gratitude. Encouraged, he continued his explanations, talking still faster and more loudly, while she smiled and nodded, smiled and nodded, until she wanted to scream. She had borne the ordeal patiently for several minutes, and was wondering whether to give a last tremendous smile and make her retreat, when an angry voice shouted from behind a door at the back of the room: "Manga, come here, damn you!"

The bar-tender, roused to sudden activity, made for the door; but with a quick movement Barbara had passed in front of him, and it was she who went first into the inner room. The sailor might have been ignorant and stupid, or he might have been lying; perhaps it was not the Captain Jornay she sought

who had called; but an English oath was good enough in a place where men gibbered insanely in a dim room behind a silent street. She took a pace into the room and looked round.

Cut off from natural light, it was still darker than the room that opened to the street, but a candle burning on a little shelf gave it a flickering light; a strange light to one who within a few minutes had left a town drowned with sunshine. This was a smaller room, and a gentler. The walls had been papered with scraps of gushing floral design, and there were two pictures, a photograph of the Eiffel Tower and an engraving depicting swans. The floor was oilclothed, and on a little stool in one corner a fern stood. The man sat in a basket chair, with his feet stretched out and his hands lying in his lap. An elderly man, his beard either grey or white and dirty, shaped but grossly unkempt; his hair of the same colour, bristling straight up, short, though not sparse. That made it more difficult to guess his age, for his eyes were dull beneath the matted brows, and his lips flabby, yet there was nothing but hardness in the lines of his cheeks and the line between lip and chin, deep almost as a scar. A real scar swept below his left eye from his nose nearly to his ear; like a duelling-scar, but wider and more ugly. He was smoking a short pipe, and from the corner of his mouth where the pipe was stuck a messy dribble ran down to his beard. His coat, which had been a merchant officer's but was patched and dirty beyond recognition, lay open to show his filthy shirt and ragged braces. He had taken off his boots.

When the door opened he said something in a

language which Barbara did not understand, looking away from her towards the wall. She went closer to him and said: "Captain Jornay?"

He turned slowly and saw her. He did not start; only the quickness with which he took out his pipe and wiped his mouth with his sleeve in the same action betrayed his astonishment.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked.

"My name's Miss Gastell. Are you Captain Jornay?"

"Why?" he said.

She hesitated.

"I was told that I should find Captain Jornay here."

"Oh, you were. Who told you?"

"A Mr. Shond, he——"

"Oh, Shond. I know. Blasted loafing school-boy."

"Then you are Captain Jornay?"

"Ye'."

But he seemed to think it was a waste of breath, this talking of names; and she understood, for what did a man's name matter when he was sitting, so lonely as this, in a dark room with a candle? It was going to be slow and tedious work to get anything out of him, almost as slow as getting information from the dull sailor in the room outside; but however little he heeded her, he did understand what she said. It was safer here, for all the darkness and unreality; in the man on the chair there was something, oddly, that fitted the title "Captain"; perhaps his speech, which was slovenly rather than coarse in grain; perhaps his immobility, not loutish but self-possessed. He was not drunk. Probably he

had taken a good deal, for a glass or two would not bring a man with such a skin, scalded to hardness, to a state where he does not care about a dribble flowing down his chin. He had reached a state somewhere between excitement and moroseness. But his speech was not muffled, and his powers were not beyond his will's control. He had put back the pipe in his mouth and was pulling at it sharply, making blue smoke rise from the last ashes. His eyes still held hers, but plainly his thoughts were wandering. He had little to think about such a curiosity, nothing to say to her; she was good-looking, but a lady, no good for anything he could use her for, and what was a lady doing here? Had she come to give him a tract? Wasn't it bad enough sitting here sweating in a cramped little room because he hated to be seen in the town and they wouldn't have him in the boarding-houses--without a lady coming to see that his socks were in holes and his top fly-button missing? So much of his mind she could see in the dull eyes, and from a kind of politeness she looked away from him. From his palace of web and cross-web a spider was letting himself down slowly from the ceiling towards the floor; swinging a little, he disappeared for a moment, and then the light caught him again. He dropped into the shadow of Jornay's head, which was splodged over a bunch of roses on the wall. And when her eyes returned to Jornay's face another dribble had started, coursing slowly from his mouth towards his beard.

"Mr. Shond said—' she started.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Mr. Shond told me——"

"São Maharo."

"And why, in the devil's name, do you want to go there?"

"I want to live there," she said briefly. Why did everyone ask her "why?" What was it to do with them? A hopeless world, in which everyone wanted to know why you wanted it before they would sell you a pound of sugar! "Yes," she repeated, cutting him short, "I want to live there, and that's my business. All I want to know is, will you take me, and if so, what will you charge?"

But as he sucked his lips and fiddled with his buttons and moved his pipe in and out she knew that he was preparing another lecture. The whole thing might end in that lecture. That was what it was coming to. São Maharo, a few hundred miles away, and she had done six thousand; and now she couldn't get there. The Chief Officer might know, and the Captain might know, and it might be a good thing to call on Mr. Shond, perhaps he could tell her something; São Maharo? well, why not go to dear old Jornay, one of the best, he might be useful. And the adventure was ending, before it had begun, in a little dark room of a reeking brothel, a suffocating room, whose very walls sweated, with a dirty old sailor smoking and spitting and moralizing to pass the time of day; pulling his pipe out and pushing it in again, scratching his head, working himself up for another lecture.

"I understand that you're the master of a vessel," she said coldly. "It's your business to carry things to places. If you're not going to São Maharo, and won't ever be going, please say so. Otherwise, how much will it be?"

"If I landed you on that dung-heap," he said, "you'd be dead inside a week."

"Well, that's my business——"

"No white woman—or man either—could stay alive on that place for a fortnight. So now you know, and that's final."

"You're a liar," she said quietly. "A friend of mine lived there for over forty years."

Oh, so that was it!

"What friend?" he demanded.

"Her name was Thompson."

"Was?"

"Yes——"

"Then she's gone?"

"Yes."

"Poor old girl! I thought she never would die."

"You knew her?"

The name had awakened something different in the man.

"Knew her? Yes, why——"

But she would not let him stray from the path.

"She lived in São Maharo for over forty years."

"True," he replied.

"Well, then, what did you mean when——"

"I said that no white man or woman could live there a fortnight—barring Portuguese, if you call them white. And by that I meant no ordinary man or woman. She wasn't ordinary. She belonged to that island just as if she'd been born there. She'd got a strength in her that wasn't human. Disease just couldn't kill her, until I like a blamed fool took her away from the place, and now she's dead. She might have gone on living, there. She had some fight in her, the moment I was putting her on board.

She should've been dead then, but she was alive and kicking." His voice had lowered and was rumbling on almost inaudibly. He had ceased to think of the girl in front of him. "She was a fine woman. You get that sort about once in a generation, or less. There was Florence Nightingale and—what was that other old girl? She was never beaten. Yes," he said, his voice rising again, "she lived there, and she left the place alive. And just because she did, you think you can. It's always the way. When a man does something that's superhuman there's always some little sneak-thief undersized amateur that thinks he can do the same thing." He laughed suddenly. "Miss Thompson! she tried to make 'em worship the Lord God, and I'm damned if they didn't worship her! And I'm damned if I think it was a silly error. And you, you poor miserable little schoolgirl, just off your mammy's knee, you think you can do what she did." He took three sharp, fierce pulls at his pipe. "Damned infernal swank!"

His eyes, which had roved from side to side, suddenly rested on her and held her tightly. She could only go now. She got up and went to the door. But she stopped there.

"Why did you take her away?" she asked.

"What?"

"Why did you take her away?"

"Because I thought I knew what was best. I couldn't—"

"—And you think you know what's best now?"

"I not only—"

"—And having taken her away, against her will, and having robbed the people there of the person

they worshipped, you're not going to let anyone take her place?"

"There isn't anyone who could take her place. Not you, anyhow."

"Do you think that having done her a bad turn by taking her away you're doing me a good turn by refusing to take me there?"

Oh, the devil of it all! That place, with its stinking marshes and its pack of miserable cannibals, why did they all want to go there? Why should he be dragged in? Why had he ever gone near the cursed island? Was it a sort of evil fate, playing the dirty on him, that found him out when he had a sweaty headache and sent him these women who wanted to commit suicide with him holding the knife? He, who went roving backwards and forwards on the dull, nauseating sea because he didn't want to see women.

"And if I do take you there, who the devil do you think's going to bring you back?"

"I can think about that later," she said.

He said: "Oh," and looked down his trousers till his eyes fastened on one of his toes, sticking up through a hole in the sock. "Dead, poor old girl," he thought. That was proof, if any proof there was, of inevitable mortality. It would come in the end, however much it dodged and ran away with you, death. But she had wanted to live. She would have liked to die out there. Where had it happened? he wondered. She had got to England, by some miracle. Dull, wretched for the poor old thing, dying so far away; a lonely place, England. She must have been sorry to miss the chance of saying a good-bye. His fault. He would have to go to

the island, try and say something. Doris knew a bit of the lingo; he might help.

He fumbled for a handkerchief, and finding none wiped his forehead with his coat-sleeve. He couldn't stand this any longer, the heat in this room. He would go back to the *Ego*.

Barbara watched him as he felt round for his boots. He stuck his toes into one, tried to draw it on, and found that it was the wrong boot. He changed them over, wriggled his feet in, and began to lace them up. It was hard work bending down to them; he was getting too big in the belly, not enough exercise.

"Can I do that for you?" Barbara asked.

"Yes," he said, and stretched them out.

"If you'd just turn your foot up a bit more——"

"All right."

She finished lacing the boots.

"Where's my cap?" he said.

The cap was on the floor beside him.

"There it is," she said, pointing.

He straightened himself in the chair and began to fiddle with the buttons of his coat.

"You've got several missing."

"Yes."

"Have you got the buttons?"

"No. Doris may have some."

"Who's Doris?"

"Doris? I don't know. Where's my cap?"

She picked it up and gave it to him.

"Doris? He's the mate."

She was surprised to see how tall the man was when he stood up. He stood with his feet apart, toes pressing on the floor as if to answer pitch and

roll; a fine figure of a man, now that he was standing, for all his unkempt appointment and the pouched eyes, and the slaver on his chin; a man complete in himself, caring nothing for people's opinions. He was staring at the wall in front of him, across the patch of light from the candle into the dim shapes of roses and daffodils; his head thrown back a little, his chin lifted and held taut while with four fingers he tried to pull it down; uncertain; struggling to decide between several courses which were equally futile and unimportant. Back to the *Ego*, or go into the town and hope not to be noticed, get a bath somewhere, or sit down again and have another drink; he was getting dry again now.

He was something big and uncommon, Barbara thought. He had been a very ordinary man, storming at her with contemptuous speeches; it was one of the things that education taught you, that anyone could make contemptuous speeches. But he had changed into something different. Before, it was useless to argue with him because he was childish and obstinate. Now he was too grown-up to be argued with.

At last he made up his mind, strode to the door and opened it. The one man who went to São Maharo, the first she had heard of after days of inquiry, was going away. With him went the only chance. The island was sinking beneath the sea.

"I say!" she called after him, and he stopped. "Won't you take me?"

"Take you? Where?"

"To São Maharo."

"Oh yes, I suppose so."

For a moment she did not know what to say. Then:

"When do you start?" she asked, trying to say it calmly.

He said over his shoulder: "I don't know. You'd better go to Empire Wharf and find Doris."

§

It was shortly after eleven at night when the *Ego of Africa* passed the pier-head light; and sixty-four days later, about seven bells in the afternoon watch, that Doris, squinting through his telescope, saw the coast of São Maharo.

The journey was indirect, and like all voyages of the *Ego*, uncertain even from point to point. She sailed at the will of her master, and her cargo was under battened and sealed hatches; Doris must have known something about the immediate destination, since he had most to do with the handling of the papers and shared the watches with Jornay, as far as such niceties of navigation were observed at all; and the helmsman, who was alone on the bridge whenever the wide horizon was unbroken, may sometimes have guessed from the course he was given; but what she carried, where she would discharge, where she would go next, that was Jornay's affair, and no one could ever tell how far Jornay himself knew. He paid remarkably good wages, and was not the kind of man who is asked questions. As far as Jornay's present plans could be divined, São Maharo hardly existed. "Maharo?" he said, answering Doris. "Maharo? I don't know. Yes, we might. I don't

know." And they sailed to Beira, where they stayed a few hours and Jornay went ashore. A few cases, four or five, were loaded; two Dutchmen came aboard, one in uniform, and were talking in Jornay's cabin for half an hour; and before it was light they had sailed again, setting north-east along the coast.

Barbara controlled her feelings by a miracle of patience, certain that they would reach her destination at last. She could hardly account for this certainty. It was partly a faith in Jornay's integrity—one instinctively trusted the "I suppose so" of a man who said few words when he was quite sober—and partly a belief that the supreme Will which had so strangely turned her face towards an unknown country would give her the means to reach it. From time to time she asked Doris: "I suppose he hasn't forgotten?" and the reply was always the same: "Why, no, miss, I don't suppose so." She waited, experiencing no little homesickness and discomfort, clinging to her intuitive belief.

Jornay himself ignored her entirely. "Your passenger," he said, when he talked of her to Doris, which was seldom. At table—the three usually messed together—he did not seem to notice her, and when he spoke at all it was a brief remark to his mate. At first she had persistently said: "Good morning" when meeting him for the first time. He had walked past her, looking out to sea; and the fourth or fifth time he had called to one of the crew: "Hi, Kuno! go and tell Mr. Doris his passenger wants something." But Doris himself, good sailor, born subordinate, manager of Jornay's affairs ashore and aboard, was consistently kind to her. "The skipper, he's a man who's always a bit

wrapped up in himself," he explained. "He don't mean anything uncivil. Poor man!" (lowering his voice) "he's never known the love of the Lord Almighty." It was Doris' great tragedy, his failure to convert his skipper. True, he did no better with the changing crews; but they were foreigners and half-castes mostly, rough sailor-men, born to intemperance, unworthy to be called to the Things which are Holy. Jornay was a grief to him, a perpetual reminder of his failure in the Lord's service. To have a passenger who was a missionary, a very Prophet of the Lord but for her petticoats, was balm and unction to his spirit; and whenever he was not at one of his multifarious jobs about the ship he would sit with her, a little troubled by her ungodly habit of smoking, reading her Wesley's sermons in his queer double-barrelled voice, from a travel-stained volume with long-shaped S's. He had given her his own cabin, making do for himself in improvised quarters, and lent her his Bunyan.

They touched the Comoros and the Aldabras, dropping a case or two. To Barbara it seemed far to go for such little business, but Doris refused to explain. Then south-east and round into Tamatave; and when, after two days, they left Tamatave by night and Barbara's hopes rose, east again, to Mauritius, and on to Rodriguez; further, still further away from São Maharo.

§

It was as they were leaving Rodriguez that Jornay broke his silence for the first and only time. Barbara was lying half asleep when the motion of

the ship woke her, and afterwards sleep would not come. The cabin was unbearably stuffy, with the port stuck and for all time immovable, and presently she put on a coat and went out to walk on the deck. It was a very still night, with the sky dull violet and mysterious and the ship on half steam breaking the water in a gentle lapping and hiss. The lights of the island were already a good way aft, so that their reflection in the water could no longer be seen; and ahead, nothing but star-sprinkled darkness, the sky reaching down unbroken into the dark sea. She stood still for a while, her face turned to catch the cool breeze that the ship's motion made against the hot night. The lap and hiss bounded all sound as the wide sky bounded all vision. It was silence made more perfect, loneliness made more romantic. And into the deep peace came the sound of a glass breaking and a man's oath, and a door opened to let a shaft of yellow light fall across the deck.

She turned quickly and saw Jornay's huge form outlined in the doorway of his cabin. He stood there for a moment, his arms stretched out for support against the bulkheads, drawing quick breaths with a curious sucking noise; then he turned his shoulder, stepped over the coaming, and slammed the door behind him.

Frightened by the suddenness of his appearance, Barbara tried to slip away into the shadow of a ventilator. But he saw her and called out hoarsely:

"Is that you, Miss Thompson?"

She did not answer and he came nearer.

"Look here," he said, "we're going sou'-west. D'you hear? We're going sou'-west!"

His voice was angry and frightened; and still she did not know what to reply. He went on speaking.

"I don't want to go. God knows, I don't want to go. It's a foul place. It's never done me any good. And you're making me go." He turned his back on her, took a few paces, and returned again. "I took you away, and I suppose I've got to take you back. But once you're back you've got to stop, and I'll be burned in hell before I come to take you off again. D'you hear? You can die a hundred deaths for all I care."

He walked away again, and back again.

"Why did I ever go near it? God knows, I don't! I tell you I don't care what happens to you. I don't care whether you die here or there. Why the devil do you plague me? Why couldn't you go to a hospital and die like a normal woman? Why? Why? Blast you! Oh, I suppose you can't help it. What are you saying? I can't hear you. What are you saying? Don't stand guggling at me! I tell you, I don't want anything to do with God, and I don't want anything to do with women. I spend all my time carting a missionary woman about, taking her one way because she's dying and another way because she won't die. I'm not going to do it any more—d'you hear? Once you're back you stay back, and it's no good your shouting for me, nor God putting his spoke in either. D'you hear?"

He strode past her roughly and went the whole length of the deck, while she waited motionless, afraid of being afraid. She hoped that he would go away, up to the bridge, or across to the port

deck. But he swung round suddenly and came striding back to her.

"Look here!" he said, speaking right into her face. "You're angry 'cause I took you away, and you've put God on to me. Now I'm takin' you back, see? That's what you want, isn't it? You're sure that's what you want?" His voice was low now, hoarsely supplicating. "Well, if I do what you want you'll make it all right, won't you? You'll stop God interfering? I don't want to interfere with Him. I've got nothing but whisky on board now, and there's heaps of Christians drink whisky. If He goes His way, I'll go mine. You'll make it a' right, won't you? I'm doing what you want. You won't keep me going back to that place, will you? You won't tell people what I've been doing? Look here, Miss Thompson, you won't, will you?"

She could not answer him, except with a noise in her throat. Something had wedged itself in the passage that the words came through. So he left her, and went back to his cabin, and turning his head there he shouted over his shoulder: "Damn and blast you!" Then he went inside and pushed the door shut, leaving the deck in darkness, and the silence marked by the lap and hiss of the water as the ship steamed south-west.

§

The *Ego* held her course across a flat, featureless sea, while the sun moved over her and dipped below the horizon; came up, and moved over, and dipped again. Till at last Doris, who for two days past

had become excited and secretive, held up his ancient telescope, squinted through it with a grimace of suffering, focussed it laboriously, and screwed it into his eye once more.

"Miss!" he called, "come here!" and he gave her the telescope. "What do you see?"

Barbara saw nothing.

"Push her out a bit, no, push her in," he instructed. "Your sight's maybe not the same as mine. There! No, a bit more this way. Now what do you see?"

Then she did see a faint line just above the horizon.

"And that," said Doris triumphantly, "is him!"

Almost at the same moment a boy slipped down from the rock that was shaped like a wolf's head, hurled himself down the slope, half leaping, half falling, plunged into the trees, and ran like a deer towards the village called Harbour Town, crying out like a man insane.

§

She strained her eyes towards the horizon, her heart stamping, until she could see the faint line without the telescope; then, very slowly, the line took a shape and in the grey strip a difference of light and dark came into being. She went to find Doris.

"Not far off now?" she asked him.

"A good way," he said. "You see a long way, these parts. It's unnatural clear to-day. Looks like something comin'."

"Shall we be in to-night?"

"Maybe. I can't say. The skipper may want to lay off for a bit. He's in one of his awkward frames."

She went to her cabin to do the final packing, and when she came back an hour later the coast seemed no nearer. "You see unnatural clear to-day," Doris repeated as he passed her. There was something awesome in the strip of light and dark grey, so that she waited eagerly for the first sign of colour to make it land instead of pencilled frieze; but she was to see no green on São Maharo that day, for the sun was already low, and as the coast came nearer, slowly, ever so slowly, it was set dark against a burning yellow sky. An hour later, a little nearer and bigger, it was nothing but a patch of blackness. But the wind, which was rising steadily, brought to the ship a queer hot smell.

"Of course it's fancy," Doris said. "But you think sometimes when you're a mile or two out you can smell these stinkin' marshy places."

He went below again. He was very busy now, fussy, and strangely worried; fussiness was natural to him, when in sight of land, but he seldom looked anxious. He was running hither and thither, betraying his sudden anxiety by the sharpness with which he barked little unimportant orders. Except for this one remark he paid no attention to Barbara, perhaps because he had other things to do, perhaps, she thought, because he regretted the parting in store and must hide his feelings beneath alert masculine aloofness. When he came up again, however, he stopped for a moment to speak to one of the men. It was a man called Higgins, Bristol-born, one who signed regularly with Jornay. Their conversation was in low tones, almost in whispers.

"More than a capful!" Higgins said. "Feel 'er 'ow she's bein' skittish already."

"It's nothin'," said Doris, but automatically he glanced up at the clouds and down at the water. "Queer, comin' so sudden," he added.

"Not the first time!" Higgins bunched his lips and spat sideways. "I've said before, I don't never like comin' around this ruddy little island. Always somethink queer."

"It's nothin'," Doris repeated, and walked on; for he had other things to trouble him besides a chick of wind.

§

"Doris!" yelled Jornay. "Doris, blast you! where are you?"

"Here, sir!"

Doris scuttled down the companion and ran as he seldom ran towards Jornay, who was raging at the door of his cabin.

"Tell Higgins to go up," Jornay shouted. "Have some sense, man! Higgins! Oh, he's there, all right!" He turned to Doris. "Where are you goin'?"

"I wasn't goin' anywhere, sir, I——"

"Fool! Where are you takin' the ship?"

"Towards the 'arbour, sir. You said——"

"I said! What did I say? I don't care what I said. You're surely not such a blamed fool as to think you can take her into an unlighted hole in the coast a night like this? Have y' ever been 'board ship before? Don't answer me like that! Have y' ever been on anything bar a trippin' steamer?"

Don't stand gaping at me, y'fool! Do something!"

"You mean, sir——?"

"Stop the engines, y'fool! Don't you know how to take the way off a ship? D'you want me to come'n work the donkey for you m'self?"

"You mean we're to lay to for the night, sir?"

"No," said Jorhay. "I mean you're to go full steam ahead into the coast and break all our bloody necks."

With that he slammed the door of the cabin.

For a second Doris stood still, dumbfounded by the storm. Then he went away, mumbling to himself, to give the orders. Barbara found him a few minutes later.

"Haven't the engines stopped?" she asked.

"Yes, miss. Skipper's orders."

"But does that mean——?"

"Lay to for to-night. Sorry, miss! The skipper, he'd rather be thrown about here all night than lay up cosy in the creek. There ain't no lights, he says. A place like that what you'd go in with a scarf round your eyes! That comes of having no faith in the Lord," he added contemptuously.

"Oh," she said.

Foolish as she felt it to be, the disappointment was a hard one. It only meant waiting a few hours, and she would be asleep for most of them; but now, within a yard of her goal, she could not bear to be delayed. She was strung up and excited, nervous about the prospect—though to herself she admitted none of those emotions, except excitement. It was like the last moment before a first-eleven match, when someone had failed to turn up and the two

sides stood waiting, making feeble jokes to hide their nervousness. Her life was waiting for her there, somewhere in that dark patch against the skyline. She wanted to see it, to touch it, to hear the first words spoken in what was to be her own country. She felt that they were waiting for her. They had waited so long, and now, when they could see the red light almost at arrow's distance, there were hours still for them to wait. "But to-morrow!" she thought.

There was nothing for it but bed. She shouted a good night to Doris and went below. "The last time!" she thought, as she wound her watch and hung it on the nail above her bunk. Through the dirty port she could just see the smudge that separated sea from sky. To-morrow! They might not like her. They might be so angry, finding it was not Miss Thompson, that they would have nothing to do with her. They might—but with only an oil-lamp against the surrounding darkness one always felt like that. It was better not to think of to-morrow night. To-morrow morning the bright sunshine would give even São Maharo, with the blessing of light and colour, something to make it normal, unalarming. It was strange to-night, living in an old world with the new world hard by. It would be all right to-morrow.

She had half undressed when she heard Jornay's voice again, bellowing to wake the fishes.

"Doris! Where are you? Come here!"

She could hear Doris running along the deck, and then Jornay again. His next words, spoken thickly and not so loud, were lost. But she heard Doris answer.

"But the young lady, sir! She——"

"What young lady?" from Jornay.

"The young lady who—Miss——"

"I don't want anything to do with women. D'you hear? I don't want anything to do with women, or God either. I've done enough little jobs for God."

She heard the door slammed, but a moment later it opened again.

"Doris! Come here, blast you! If the bitch wants to go ashore she can go in a boat. Tell McDayne I want steam in half an hour. Not later—half an hour!"

Before Doris had fully absorbed the new orders Barbara was beside him on the deck. She had slipped a trench-coat over her shoulders and was clasping it about her. He noticed that her feet were bare.

"Look here, miss," he said, "I'm sorry, but——"

"I know," she snapped, "I heard him. He's a liar and a thief. Well, you must get the boat ready. And in——"

"But you can't do that, miss. On a sea like this a small boat ain't safe, not any boat we've got, an' besides——"

"I shall want two men to take up my luggage. Not yet, I shall want five minutes to pack up."

"But miss——" he said.

She turned on him.

"I've paid my money to be taken to São Maharo. I shall expect that boat to be ready in five minutes."

It took her less than five minutes to pack and to dress again. There were only a few things to be thrown into the expanding case, a pair of slippers, pyjamas, a few handkerchiefs, a Bible, a sponge-

bag. The two trunks were packed and locked already. All the main items were stowed away, Miss Thompson's plans and manuscripts, the medical box, the books on medicine and surgery, the case of carpentering tools, the compass, a thousand cigarettes, a roll of bright chintz—the Mission House was not going to be dowdy—a photograph of Major Gastell, threads and needles, a pile of underclothes, four pairs of shoes and two dozen pairs of stockings.

"I'm ready!" she shouted.

On deck she found Doris twitching with nervousness, snapping at his men, rubbing his wrists against the sides of his jacket. He was doing nothing; but further aft, on the port deck, a group of men was busy.

"You'll want two men on each of those trunks," she said. She had brought up the case herself. "If you can't spare four men they can bring them up one at a time. Have you got a boat ready? Who's taking me?"

"Look here, miss——" he began.

"There's not much time," she said. "Here, you! You're not doing anything! Get another man and go to my cabin and bring up those two trunks."

"You'll never get them two trunks into a small boat," said Doris.

He hoped faintly that this would be a determining obstacle.

"What! Haven't you got a decent-sized boat?"

"It's fair-sized, but she's low in the water and she leaks shocking. I don't think it'd be safe——"

"Who's going to take me?" she asked.

The men were a long time getting up the trunks. She stood on the deck impatiently, shivering a little

because the air was cold, much as she had stood a lifetime before on the platform at Waterloo. To cool her impatience she had lit a cigarette, and was smoking it with short puffs, neither smelling nor tasting the smoke.

"I expect I've cost more in messing than I paid," she said, "but I didn't ask to be brought all this way round. You can tell Captain Jornay he must write to me if he's not satisfied. Look here, I've written two addresses on this paper. Directly you get to a port I want you to send a cable to each of them, saying that I've landed. You won't forget, will you? Here's ten shillings. You can get it changed. Do you know how to encode a cable? Well, you'd better get one of the shipping offices to send them. And I want you to post these two letters. They're very important, because it may be a year before I can get another off. I rely on you—don't forget!"

The trunks were up at last, and the men were roping them ready to be lowered. Doris had given up hope. It was madness, but there was no doing anything with the young lady in this mood. The problem was now, who to send? He ought to go himself, but could he leave the ship? Jornay was drunk beyond all competence and all self-control. He might up-anchor and away before they got back. Still, he ought to go. He could leave Higgins. That would mean taking at least one Lascar to row. Lobell would do for the other, he was English after a fashion. Yes, leave Higgins, and trust in the Lord that Jornay was beyond anything but shouting.

"All right," he said, "I won't forget. Yes, I'm

taking you. Hi, Lobell!" he shouted, "you're comin', and bring Duke Brown. Have you got them trunks stowed? And the case? Have you put in any oars, by any chance? All right, you go now."

The men went down first, and Barbara followed. She found it more difficult than she had thought, climbing down the swaying rope-ladder as the ship rose and fell. She took one look downwards and saw the boat close beneath her, and then it sank down suddenly, a giddy distance below. She turned her eyes upwards, then, and saw in the yellow light of the lanterns a long row of heads, Portuguese heads, Negro heads, Latvian heads, heads of Norwegians. They were fixed on her, those invisible faces, wondering. They had seen queer things, between harbour and harbour, but this they could not understand. Cautiously, rung by rung, she went down, clinging tightly to the ropes. A man said: "Jump!" She glanced down, saw the boat right under her feet, let go, and fell backwards into it sprawling, as it sank again, away down under the ship. A moment later, as the boat rose, Doris stepped lightly on to the stern thwart, bent down to steady himself, and felt for the rudder-lines.

"Shall I take an oar?" Barbara asked.

"You sit where you are, miss."

"She can bale," said Lobell, "there's a bucket there, miss, just be'ind you. She'll want a bit o' balin' before we get back," he said to Doris.

They had cast off, and were pulling with short hard strokes away from the ship.

"I told her," said Doris, "it wasn't safe with them trunks in this boat."

"She always did take a lot o' water," said Lobell.

The Lascar was silent, and only grinned at a joke that seemed to be all his own, as he plugged steadily at his oars.

"I always said," Lobell repeated, grunting the words between his strokes, "that this 'ere boat took more water'n what was reasonable nor safe. Mr. Jornay, 'e 'ad 'er second 'and from Noah 'imself."

"You leave the Bible alone!" said Doris. It was partly his fault that the *Ego* carried outworn gear; not that Jornay would have been encouraging had he suggested replacements; Jornay preferred to spend his money on a pink gin for the inspector. "You don't know what you're talkin' about, about Noah, nor any other Christian gentleman," said Doris.

Barbara baled energetically, not without reason. The boat was taking water, top and bottom, as she sank into the furrows and tumbled over the ridges. The men pulled hard, but as far as she could see in the darkness they were making slow progress; and it was all she could do to keep down the level of the water which ran chortling an inch above the floor-boards.

"It's them trunks," said Doris. "Lobe, you better stop rowin' and bale."

"No," said Lobell decisively, "we won't get nowhere any time when I stop rowin'. The Duke's only spankin' the top o' the waves."

From the quick way he spoke, more than from his flat disobedience to orders, Barbara knew that he was frightened; and in a moment the Lascar was frightened, too.

"We better go back ship," he said suddenly.

"Shut up, you!" said Doris. "Get on with y'work! I'll get a rope onter you."

But Doris, too, was frightened. Despite the vigorous baling, the water must have risen half an inch. It was coming in 'through every crack between the clinkers; every wave added half a bucketful as the boat lifted half sideways on to the crests and lurched down with a thump into the hollow beyond. Doris, with his hands on the lines, could do nothing.

"Miss," he shouted suddenly, "we can't do it. I'm sorry!" and as he spoke he jerked one of the lines, and the men, dropping their starboard oars square into the water, began to pull round.

"Stop!" shouted Barbara. "Stop, you fools! Doris, bring her straight. It's only a hundred yards. You can make it. You can't make the ship."

The loud anger of her voice was enough to check the manœuvre. There was reason in what she said. With a jerk on the port line Doris had her round again, her nose straight at the shore.

"It's more'n a hundred yards," he said.

But she did not hear him. She only shouted: "Row, you fools, get on, row!" as she dug the bucket into the bilge and swept the water overboard, and dug and pitched again. "Go on, you fools, row!"

A chieftain of waves came up from the stern, lifted the boat bodily and hurled it twenty feet towards the shore. At once the noise of a hundred people shouting broke through the thunder on the shingle and the high voice of the wind. Looking

over their shoulders, the men saw something, a waving, dancing line, living beings.

"There's people there, savages!" Lobell shouted, as he buried his starboard oar and leaned back on the port with all his weight and strength. All ready for the sign, the Lascar followed him. The rudder was useless against them. Dropping his lines, Doris seized a bucket and began to bale. The Lascar left go of an oar for an instant, seized the suitcase, lying on the floor between his legs, and with a jerk of his arm hurled it over the side. It took but a moment, and both men were swinging together again, working furiously, as the bows tipped this way and that, but were always back again on the red light out at sea. Mechanically, but with twice redoubled energy, they were dropping and kicking, dropping and kicking, forcing her through the waves, gaining a little distance, away from the shore.

Barbara stopped baling. They might get back to the ship, they might not. It didn't matter to her. Her affair was all over. A hundred yards away, and a brace of cowards had finished it off, rung down the curtain. The adventure was over. Back to sanity.

Then she heard a woman's voice, low and fierce, just behind her ear.

"Go on! go on! You must get there! You can't stop now!"

She stood up, holding the side of the boat to steady herself, and in almost one movement had wriggled off her coat. She bent, tore the straps of her shoes, and kicked them away. In a moment her jersey was off, her skirt, then her petticoat. Doris

furiously baling, saw nothing. Lobell heard the splash as she jumped over, and turned round.

"Christ!" he shrieked.

As he looked up, Doris just saw the girl on top of a wave, three waves away, swimming hard.

"Stop!" he shouted, "stop rowing! You can't
____,"

"She's gone," said Lobell, and went on pulling.

Taking a wave obliquely the boat slipped and was carried shorewards. Petrified, Doris stood up and shot his eyes over the water. He saw nothing. She was gone. She might be under the boat. She might be just rising, the last time, somewhere in that turmoil of spray and breaker.

"God help her!" he said, "oh God, help her!"

The men, helped by the lightening of the boat, rowed on steadily.

Doris put his hands to his mouth and with all the strength of his lungs yelled: "Miss! Miss! Are you all right?"

The girl's voice came back faintly out of the darkness.

"All right."

THE END

